Pan Multiverse Good Time Association
By
Alexander Gordon Jahans

Chapter 1
The Despair of the Mundane

Shaun Emmanuel was twenty three, overweight, autistic, very much a virgin and holding a dagger bought at a convention above his chest. He was livestreaming the event on youtube, the new hip way to leave suicide notes.

“I am not a fool. I know how pathetic and worthless I am. I know that nothing I do is of any significance. I have but one hope left, a plea to whatever deities are left to take my soul and give it meaning in whatever afterlife is left.”

The dagger swung down, there was a spurt of blood and Shaun blacked out.

*

Shaun woke up in hospital with all his friends and family around him. Which wasn’t many. He was chastised for his actions and hugged by teary loved ones. Mostly though it felt like just another fuck up and nothing really important.

Life passed for the next few months rather indifferently. There were family fall outs, a couple of failed job interviews, another five attempts to claim jobseeker’s allowance and lots of time spent listening to audiobooks and playing Dragon Age Inquisition. The only event of any significance for Nine Worlds Geek Fest, a convention for nerds and those interested in nerd culture. He had been the previous four years and decided to go this year as his Dragon Age character.

At the convention all was well. He had gotten a few good questions in at the panels, he had Steven Baxter’s autograph on the latest Long Earth book and he had met up with some of his old convention friends.

Now it was the middle of Saturday and he was shattered from being in costume all day long. Perhaps the green body paint was a bad idea.

“Argonian hey? I favour the khajit myself. Here have a drink, you look like you could use it?” said a voice beside him, handing him a half finished bottle of coke.

“Thanks” he said as he glugged it greedily, then he turned to look at the kind woman who had taken pity on him. She was overweight, wearing thick but barely noticeable makeup, had long ginger hair, wore glasses and dressed in the most magnificent hand crafted tardis dress.

She caught him looking and said cheekily. “Do you want me to flash you?”

Shaun stared at her, bemused. “If you want to?”

She beamed and pulled open the doors of her tardis dress to reveal a gorgeous corset upon which a tapestry of the tardis console and interior could be seen.

Shaun's mouth dropped.

She laughed. "I'm Kirstin, pleased to meet you."

Shaun found his mouth suddenly dry. "Err, Shaun. Shaun Elizabeth Emmanuel. I like you."

Kirstin laughed. "You don't seem so bad yourself. Tell you what? I and a few of the other tardises are going to get nachos. Want to join us? I'll pay."

Shaun nodded and followed, he hadn't tried nachos before.

Shaun and Kirstin became fast friends and kept in touch over the internet once the convention ended but they were just friends. Two people who met by chance and hit it off at a convention.

By the next year Shaun had a TEFL internship in Thailand and could afford to go back to Nine Worlds Geek Fest. He even bought small gifts for his convention friends.

"And a cat for you Kirstin." said Shaun as he presented the wood carving.

Kirstin hugged him. "Thank you, that's so sweet, I didn't get you anything."

"You didn't have to." said Shaun. "Seeing the people I care about happy is what's important to me."

Kirstin smiled at him.

He smiled back.

The next day, during the hump in the convention Kirstin found him in Starbucks once more.

"Whatcha doing?" asked Kirstin.

"Recovering. Neil Gaiman is a very popular man. That queue was not fun." said Shaun as he nursed a Mountain Dew.

Kirstin took a seat beside him. "Well I'm glad you're not busy. There's something I want to talk about and I know it's going to be hard and by all means shut me down if it's too much for you."

She was looking at him like he was a sick puppy.

He looked at his Mountain Dew. "Go on."

"I found your livestream." She said with enough meaning in her voice to indicate which particular livestream.

The words hit him like a sledgehammer and seemed to break the confident sociable shell he presented at the convention. He felt suddenly small, ugly, stupid and despicable.

"Shit." said Kirstin quietly, seeing the effect of her words.

Somewhere deep inside of him, some inner strength took over. “Why do you ask?”

“Because you are not alone.” said Kirstin carefully.

“And how would you know that?” said Shaun, his words meaning to cut. “Do you know how many people watched that livestream? Just two. One was a spammer advertising penis enlargement and the other was egging me on, crying that he was getting bored and I would be a faggot if I didn’t follow through. I was found because my dad came up to my room to scream at me about being jobless. It’s all recorded. The world gives zero fucks about me.”

He stared at her and watched her blush with embarrassment and shame.

“I know you are not alone because I also tried to take my life” said Kirstin quietly.

Shaun stared at her, shocked.

“I wasn’t born Kirstin, I was born Edmund. I was raised to be the inheritor of power but I lacked the arrogance that made my father great because I hated myself. Hated my skin, hated the power and privilege I was granted because of a gender forced upon me. Overtime I began to change. Testosterone was produced in less numbers and estrogen more. A rare medical condition. My father wanted to get me all the private healthcare I needed. I obfuscated him, claimed it was good politics for me to use the NHS. Really I felt more alive and more me than I had ever before.”

Kirstin stopped to take a drink of her iced tea before continuing.

“I fell off the rails then, I started doing drugs, gambling, started dealing to pay for mistresses to beat me and insult me. It was tremendously cathartic to have how I felt about myself expressed so clearly and so plainly. Then one day a newbie at the club touched a nerve. I can’t recall exactly what she said but the effect landed me in prison. I had never been so angry. So now I was a rich fey white skinny submissive in prison. One thing led to another and I was raped at knife point. My dad pulled me out. Money can do that. House arrest, counselling, community service. That’s when I connected the dots, that’s when I realised the simple truth that had been denied me all this time. I wasn’t a man, I had never truly been a man. All that macho posturing had been because I had been born into a role and I had never thought to question it, indeed I found questioning it made me mad like it hurt my very soul.”

“Wow...” breathed Shaun quietly

“Oh it gets better.” said Kirstin dryly. “I came out to my dad, asking if he could help me get better. He said I was mad, that I had gone crazy from my experience, that he refused to help me mutilate myself. He cut me off financially. So I threw myself off a building and my glasses broke, scarring my face, when I hit the safety netting. The resulting media uproar forced him to give me a flat and a base level of income so I could live well enough to not commit suicide again.”

Shaun stared at her. “I’m so sorry”

Kirstin took his hand and squeezed it. “Don’t be, it’s water under the bridge now. The point

is that you are not alone. I am here for you."

Shaun nodded. "Likewise. Do you want anything to drink? Perhaps something to eat?"

"I could go for a burger" said Kirstin with a smile.

Shaun smiled and they walked off together. Finally able to talk to each other properly, warts and all without the fear of rejection for their pasts.

*

Shaun and Kirstin grew close after that. The knowledge that they had drawing them together when times were tough. At the next year's Nine Worlds Geek Fest, their third together, they found each other and the chemistry was obvious to everyone. They met up in the mid convention hump at Starbucks.

Shaun began. "Kirstin, I-?"

Kirstin interrupted. "No, Shaun, please I need to say something?"

They looked at each other, studied their expressions.

"May I-?" began Shaun.

"Yes." answered Kirstin simply and she kissed him on the cheek.

Shaun looked stunned then kissed her back.

They locked lips.

"No." said Shaun "I need to do this in private"

"Follow me." said Kirstin as she strode off into the hotel.

"Always." breathed Shaun as he followed.

Kirstin led them to the Police Public Call Box prop every convention always has for photo opportunities.

Shaun stared at it incredulous then shrugged. "Geronimo."

Kirstin and Shaun started snogging as they entered the blue box and closed the door behind them.

"Ahem!" said the tall thin blonde woman standing before the seven sided control console.

Shaun stopped, sheepish now and blushed.

Kirstin looked the blonde woman up and down then said with a wry smile. "Do you want to join in?"

The blond woman glowered. "You are standing inside a seghat, an elite, multiversal

transport vehicle capable of blending in everywhere and you want a threesome?”

Shaun looked up sharply. “Threesome?”

Kirstin smiled and licked her lips. “I’m game if you are?”

The blond woman glared at Kirstin and Shaun. “Kirstin Hague, Shaun Emmanuel, my name is Samsquela Hoolu Vupunshelicht. I am an agent of the interference wing of the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association. I have been chosen as your guide and bodyguard. I am also a Sylph and as such have been gifted to you as part of the welcome pack for joining our magnificent collective. Sex between Sylphs and their masters and mistresses is very much taboo. You may call me Sammy.”

Shaun’s was stunned, he didn’t know what to say.

Kirstin did. “Sammy, we are nerds. We are not cattle to be blindly abducted. I know the science of how this is bigger on the inside and of the multiverse. You can’t fool me with some advanced tech we’re being kidnapped.”

Sammy shook her head. “According to my intel if I did not interrupt then you would have died of a heart attack mid coitus, both of you. What I have just done is save you and fake your deaths to fit the records. You are thus welcomed into the collective of the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association. I am ordered to fly us to arrivals and begin the tour from there.”

“Okay...” said Shaun uncertainly.

Kirstin glared at him.

Shaun shrugged. “Not like much is waiting for us at home. Why not go down the rabbit hole?”

Kirstin looked into his eyes then nodded “We face this together”

*

Chapter 2
Down The Rabbit Hole

“In the Beginning there was nothing. Complete Nothing. And that meant no logic to dictate what nothing is, so nothing could be anything, everything.”
CN=NL=N=A

So you were just kidnapped on the moment of your death...
Rule 1. Stay Calm - The Sylph who just kidnapped you will know how to look after you and get you set up in your new life in the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association

Rule 2. Let your Sylph do their job - They trained for this job and they are giving their lives to ensure your safety and well being. Trust them.

Rule 3. Do not worry about the Sylph -

All our Sylphs are sustainably sourced volunteers who have been fully educated about the risks and rewards of becoming a Sylph. Furthermore once you have been set up with a house, occupation and social circle your Sylph can be transformed into any animal, form or societal role you wish. Simply take them to one of our certified Sylph Care Parlors and a tattoo will transform them to your whims. This is of course fully reversible and changeable.

Rule 4. Don't be afraid to ask questions -

Your Sylph volunteered, was trained, chosen and educated to be your Sylph. They know how you think, what you like, what questions you might ask and how to answer you.

*

Kirstin stopped reading the welcome leaflet, folded it and put it in her pocket.

Shaun was marveling at the great machine they were inside. "It really is bigger on the inside isn't it?"

Sammy snorted. "Yeah. It's also alive."

Shaun stared at her. "You're kidding? Right?"

Sammy shook her head, smiling as she worked the flight controls. "The Logicios, they're misogynistic super nerds with techno powers, they take sylphs like me, blast them with logic until the Sylphs adapt and become energy beings. They offer them a choice, become allied with the Logicios and the heart of a SEGHAT or die. Those that turn down the Logicios are blasted with microscopic particles of pure logical void, effectively killing them then their bodies are slaved to other systems. The ones who say yes, they are fed energy and matter until they grow the basic shell of a SEGHAT. Then engineers come in and install living quarters, life support systems and various computerized and regulatory systems, all of which limits how much work the Sylph needs to do which is just gravy by them. I mean if you could fly through the multiverse wouldn't you rather focus your energy into flying than making sure the place you land has a habitable atmosphere for your occupants?"

Shaun fell silent and stared at the console.

Kirstin announced. "According to this we can turn miss barbie doll here into a cat if we want? Or a dog? I think she'd make a good Golden Retriever."

"Cool, I guess." said Shaun absently.

Sammy muttered. "Funny what different people take from reading the same thing."

Kirstin smiled and strode up to Sammy, just too close for comfort. "So whatcha doing?"

"Trying not to get us killed." said Sammy without looking up from her work.

"Uh huh." said Kirstin. "And what is a sylph? I mean I don't want to offend but what are you?"

Sammy shrugged. “You’ve heard of the fountain of youth? The philosopher’s stone? The cure to old age? Well it exists but it has a side effect. It makes you perfect. The perfect soldier. The perfect lover. The perfect daughter. The perfect pet. The perfect cattle. Yes, even the perfect toy. Now note how many of those things require or benefit from loyalty, obedience, gullibility and being easy to manipulate. The Sylphs are tools, genetically engineered to survive and prosper under the protection of another.”

Now Sammy looked Kirstin in the eye. “I know why you hate me and it’s perfectly understandable but I am molded by you, if you turn me into a weapon there is not a single power in the multiverse that would stop me. For the moment I have the strength of will and training to resist. I chose to be your Sylph because I wanted to make both of you happy, please don’t make me your enemy.”

Suddenly there came a sound like a stammering “Sh!” and Shaun was stirred from his thoughts. “The hell is that noise!?”

Kirstin glared at him. “It’s obvious isn’t it? We are in a ship that’s bigger on the inside with a central art deco console, that strange sound is us landing. Come on, Sammy, walkies!”

Sammy glared at her. “That is immigration and decontamination. I go through there I’ll come out the otherside a complete wreck. Besides I need to return this. I’ll see you on the other side.”

Shaun rolled his eyes. “Whatever.”

*

Sammy was tapping her foot nervously as she waited for Shaun and Kirstin to exit. Cab drivers, coach drivers and friends and relatives waited for their charges likewise.

Shaun exited first, pulling on his shirt. He was groaning as he walked.

Sammy rushed forward to get him.

“Every probe has been stuck up every possible orifice, even under my eyelids. I have been scanned and interrogated. That was horrible.” said Shaun.

Kirstin strode out confidently, wincing slightly. “Try having your dick riddled with needles because they think you’re smuggling drugs.”

Sammy frowned. “Yes, well... They are very thorough. Now come on, the bus station is this way. Your new home awaits.”

“And the garden where we can play fetch with you?” asked Kirstin pointedly.

“Possibly.” said Sammy.

Shaun sighed. “Home please. I’m not used to walking.”

Kirstin stared at him. “Really?”

Shaun went red and squirmed under her gaze. “I’m an autistic nerd with just enough money for a good computer, fast internet and the yearly convention. I’ve spent my life sitting down.”

“If it helps, feel free to stroke me or lean on me.” said Sammy.

Kirstin glared at her and Shaun rolled his eyes.

They walked the five hundred meters to the bus station without fuss but the wait for a bus was not so easy.

Shaun found his hands wandering to Sammy’s neck and almost without thinking he started stroking her. It felt natural, like rubbing your cat’s belly.

Sammy sighed contentedly. “That’s it, just relax.”

Kirstin glared at Shaun.

Shaun realized what he was doing then stopped. He whipped his hands away, before retorting like a kid caught stealing a cookie. “What?”

Kirstin’s jaw dropped in shock and she looked away pointedly, harrumphing.

Sammy chuckled quietly.

When the bus arrived Kirstin was too shocked to speak and Shaun could only dumbly point out. “It’s a cyborg whale powered by jet farts.”

Sammy nodded and said. “Follow me.”

There was no debate.

Sammy led them up the steps to the driver, had a word with the guy then led them to seats at the back.

“How does it work?” asked Kirstin when they were sat down.

“Well some people choose to be whales and some whales get bored. Frequently this results in the people adopting forms that are smaller, this results in excess biomass that is not fit for eating. So the people who run the buses fit them up with the necessary electric jets, gravity compensators and control computers. Drivers aren’t strictly needed but it comforts the new arrivals to the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association and offers a nice easy job for people who lack the money or paperwork to enter or leave the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association.” said Sammy.

Shaun asked. “How close to the singularity is the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association?”

Sammy laughed. “That is a matter of some considerable debate.”

Kirstin studied Shaun. “What are you thinking?”

Shaun pursed his lips, gritted his teeth, took a deep breath then began “So I’ve read the

Culture books, Harry Potter, the Long Earth series, the Discworld and my fair share of the Doctor Who stuff. I know how technological development is supposed to go and this is positively ridiculous. The good lady Sammy here is of a species so adaptable it can become the heart of a multtiverse traveling spacecraft and the technology necessary to achieve this bus suggests a godlike level of omnipotence, at least compared to us. Yet it's still just a bus. It's not even bigger on the inside."

Sammy chuckled. "Clever boy."

Kirstin stared at him. "It's a bus. It doesn't need to be bigger on the inside."

"Point taken." said Shaun. "But -" He was gesturing now. "- If you have the capacity to make a bus bigger on the inside why wouldn't you? I mean look at her, Kirstin, this woman is just as human as you or I yet she can transcend to being a ball of energy capable of manipulating the laws of physics. Do you have any idea how ridiculously useful that is to society? I mean humans are already the most adaptable, most successful, most dangerous species on planet Earth, capable of changing the face of a planet in significantly less than the hundred years we each get. We are the most numerous and breed at an astounding rate for the effect we have on the world and this woman and those like her can manipulate all forms of matter energy and logic as easily as you or I might use a hoe or a bicycle. That should be revolutionary. Yet we're still taking the bus."

Sammy clapped. "I was told you were clever, I never suspected this."

Kirstin glared at him.

Shaun stared back at her. "What?"

Sammy was beaming. "And it gets better. I was not born a sylph. I was and am still to a certain extent human. I became a sylph by virtue of an easily mass produceable Sylph pill that turned me into this."

Shaun's mouth dropped open. "You're kidding?"

Sammy shook her head as she laughed

The bus stopped and flashed 'Pantheon Drive' in LEDs set into the back of each headrest.

"This would be our stop." said Sammy.

They got off the bus.

Now it was Shaun's time to laugh.

Kirstin stared. "What the fuck is that!?"

"Your home." said Sammy smugly.

It was a cube consisting of five doors on all sides that could be seen and accessed.

"How the fuck is that our home?" asked Kirstin, disgusted.

Shaun coughed he was laughing so much and after a couple of deep breaths explained. “It’s like I was saying, how close to the singularity are we? I mean back in Woking we already had 3d printers, VR headsets and the promising beginnings of vat grown food, even quantum teleportation. These guys have Sylphs and access to multiversal travel technology. Why the fuck wouldn’t their houses contravene the laws of physics?”

“Because it’s not natural!” cried Kirstin.

Shaun laughed. “You of all people should know that reality is a subjective illusion agreed upon by majority consent. Sammy, if you would?”

Kirstin stared at him, disgusted. “What are you doing?”

Shaun sighed “Well it’s obvious isn’t it? The locks they have must be a good deal more sophisticated to take into account the high level of technology available to those who want to break in. I suspect that for all intents and purposes until we become fully paid up members of this society Sammy will be quite literally the key to our getting in and out. We need her.”

Sammy opened the door and waved them through. “After you.”

“Why thank you.” said Shaun respectfully as he entered.

Kirstin glared at Sammy as she entered.

Once inside Shaun, Kirstin and Sammy stood suddenly in a recreation of the Scottish highlands looking at an impressive castle.

“Sammy, my dear...” said Shaun after a while. “Remind me to give you a back rub and bake you a cake. This is fantastic!”

Sammy beamed. “You’ll find each of your houses perfectly recreated in the castle walls, including all possessions and computers. We’ve even taken the liberty of hooking your internet and steam account up to some rather special servers that will keep your youtube and blip videos up to date and give you the latest steam games entirely for free. Plus we may have given your computers some minor quality of life upgrades such as the latest graphics cards and a practically infinite amount of ram and internal memory.”

Shaun stared off into the distance, lost in thought.

Kirstin rounded on Sammy. “Who’s we? Why are you doing all of this?”

Sammy looked shocked “You didn’t think I did all this, did you? I’m just a complementary laptop bag for flying first class. No, a lot of very talented people did a lot of very hard work to save you from death and welcome you into the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association. They try to do it for everyone so I hear. It’s amazing what you can do with the resources of an infinite number of universes.”

“Yes but even with an infinite number of universes if you are raising everyone to this level then that is going to be very expensive. I’ve read the Hunger Games, I use Tumblr, who are you shitting on to make this work? Where are the poor people, the beggars and the addicts?” said Kirstin angrily.

“Oh we have all of those but they all choose that life and we do everything possible to make their lives easier, down to minimizing wind chill, heating the ground beneath them and suffusing the rain with vitamins and minerals to sustain them. Of course some think even that is too much like a nanny state. We help people as much as they want to be helped and for every one person we do help there are at least a billion universes where life never got started for whatever reason so we mine in there, and of course we have the technology to grow everything possible at the scale necessary to make everyone truly happy within the barely noticeable birthmark on your forehead.” said Sammy.

Kirstin glared at her. “I still don’t think you’re right.” Then she looked to Shaun and couldn’t see him. She frowned.

“And Shaun’s run off. Oh this is going perfect.” said Sammy bitterly. “Come on
I’ll deliver you to your room then hunt after your wayward boyfriend.”

“Actually I’ll join you if you don’t mind” said Kirstin in a tone which made quite clear that disagreeing was not an option.

Sammy sighed then walked with Kirstin inside.

*

They found Shaun in the wardrobe trying on a suit. “It’s a beautiful.”

“What is?” asked Kirstin.

Shaun shrugged “The suit, the suits, the house, everything. This is a truly amazing world we have landed in.”

“I don’t like it.” said Kirstin. “It’s too perfect, too techno utopia, gives me the creeps. There has to be something wrong. There always is.”

Shaun shook his head as he admired himself in the mirror. “Utopias in fiction are rotten because stories are written around conflict and where is the conflict in ‘And then humans reached a certain level of technological and societal development and everything was wonderful’ ‘They lived happily ever after’ is the ending of fairytales, not the beginning or the middle.”

“Okay then if you’re so willing to believe that this is a perfect utopia lets address the elephant in the room shall we?” said Kirstin. “We were about to have sex when miss perky tits shows up and suddenly you wont look at me.”

Shaun groaned. “Okay three, no four, things. 1. If we had sex uninterrupted we would be dead right now, that is why we are here. 2. Did you not hear her? Sex between sylphs and those they live with is not allowed even if either of us wanted to. 3. I love you for your heart and soul and mind. Nobody will ever replace that, no matter how stereo-typically attractive. 4. Do you honestly think with the technology available that you won’t get to look like whatever the hell you want? I half want to become an Argonian from Skyrim. 5. I like tech and I’m autistic. I fell for you because you wore a tardis dress and you seriously think I won’t be at least a little distracted by a woman who can become a tardis? I don’t have half the social skills to hide that part of me. It’s who I am.”

“I’m not sure.” said Sammy hesitantly. “But I think that’s an apology.”

Kirstin sighed. “I’m sorry, I forget sometimes that you are blind to the social aspect. Just promise you won’t leave me?”

Shaun hugged Kirstin. “Looks are nice but heart is better and anyway I’m in too deep now. I couldn’t leave you if I wanted too.”

Kirstin nodded and kissed Shaun then she looked to Sammy and said. “Can you arrange things for me?

“They are already expecting you tomorrow.” said Sammy.

“In that case once you’ve led me to my room you may return here and accompany Shaun to his room and there after relax however you see fit. Assuming of course that you don’t break your own rules.” said Kirstin.

Sammy smiled. “Thank you.”

An hour later Sammy was lying beside Shaun as he played Dragon Age Inquisition.

“So these games with all these various stories about so many things ultimately end up focused in the same basic mechanic: Press the button to make it die?” Mused Sammy as she watched Shaun ruthlessly kill wave after wave of computer generated foes.

“Yep.” said Shaun, still focused on the game. “Abuses the fight or flight reflex, every instance of press X to die is biologically speaking creating the same reaction as coming upon a wolf in the veldt. It’s dog eat dog, do or die.” Shaun’s character got hit by an attack that almost killed him. He muttered bitterly “Motherfucker” Retreated, healed and killed the offending attacker.

Sammy snorted. “I forget how primitive you are sometimes, still so close to the apes that civilized the world by destroying it.”

Shaun didn’t react. He was too focused on killing a particularly dangerous opponent that had almost but not quite dropped his health bar low. When he killed it Shaun answered. “It’s not bad though, I mean yeah every game, no matter how prosaic or moralizing, has the player murder thousands if not millions of life forms but they’ve done studies. Tons of them. The - uh- The game is an extrapolation of tool usage that allows for the acting out of atavistic sadism, murder and greed while remaining utterly pacifistic in nature.”

Shaun murdered a foe in one shot without them realizing and cried out. “Yes!”

Then he coughed and continued his explanation. “If you do boxing or I dunno slap your gimp when you’re angry then you’re programming your brain to associate the rush of violent catharsis with good times.”

Sammy nodded. “I get you. It’s how Sylphs work. At least the modern kind that I am one of. There’s a rush of chemicals for pleasing the master. You order me to fight a war I become a soldier, you stroke me I become a pet.”

“And what do you want?” asked Shaun casually, focused on the virtual death.

Sammy shrugged. “What we all want I suppose. Purpose, meaning. Eternal youth helps.”

Shaun nodded. “Cool, you be you. I ain’t going to make you become anything you don’t want to.”

“Cheers” said Sammy absently before she realised something. “You know I think there’s something you might like?”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, we have our own version of this. There are cities where games are played. Some are civil war cities but I think the one that would suit you is Vampire City.”

“Uh-huh...”

“There’s two doors to enter from: Cattle and Vampires. The cattle live in the city and maybe join the Vampire Hunters. The vampires are given upgrades and lore and try to survive in the city too. Sometimes there are clan wars amongst the Vampires but mostly the Vampires prey on the cattle. Some cattle are really into the game and like to be actually devoured but most are happy being taken out of the game and their dna sampled to create the relevant cuts of meat.”

Shaun frowned and paused the game. “You mean people actually like to get eaten alive and it’s legal?”

Sammy chuckled. “I’m your pet remember? And besides it’s like death in those games of yours, we have the tech to make them come back.”

“And you think I should play this game? A game where you actually kill people? What? Because I kill some minimal representations of life created by code? ” asked Shaun, incredulous and a little offended.

Sammy rolled her eyes. “I’m not having a go. I chose you remember. Just speak with Diana at the Vampire Guild in Vampire City. Don’t worry about money.”

“And what will you be doing, pray tell?” asked Shaun curiously.

“Paperwork.” said Sammy bluntly.

“Ah...” said Shaun with a smile. “Must be a lot of it required for kidnapping people, faking their deaths and setting them up as citizens of your society?”

“Yep.” said Sammy casually. “I have a feeling I may need you two to send me full golden retriever tomorrow. Not literally of course, I have friends and I would rather like to keep in contact with them.”

“Duly noted.” said Shaun. “Now if you don’t mind I have a game to play.”

*

Chapter 3
LARP The Vampires

Shaun stepped into the Severed Artery vampire pub like a Guardian reader entering Royston Vasey. You could cut the tension with a knife.

Shaun watched as a tall woman in leather, hunched over a pint, muttered. “You don’t belong here.”

The air seemed to chill and Shaun could feel the hairs on the back of his neck standing on end. ‘Right...’ he thought. ‘Time to bluff like a motherfucker/’

He laughed, casually at first, then the fear and embarrassment made it rise in pitch so he twisted it into a cruel mockery of madness. Then he barked “I am the Harbinger! Arch Mage of the College of Winterhold! Dovahkiin! Ka Fariq Gatri! The man that it is very very unwise to threaten! I am the man who makes the impossible probable!”

Shaun glared at the room condescendingly and strode in to the inn. At the edge of his perception he was very dimly aware of the tall woman getting up from her seat and strolling over to him. He maintained his stride and reached the counter then said conversationally. “Tell me, Barman, what kind of harlot would attack an off-worlder before the papers on their immigration were signed?”

“Me!” cried the tall woman as she aimed a punch at his nose when he turned to look.

The punch missed as Shaun ducked between her legs and pulled her hair

“Now granted I may be hideously primitive and backwards by your standards!” cried Shaun into her ear. “But I paid attention in the school playground. There is a reason boys cut their hair!”

The woman chuckled and whipped her hair to the side, Shaun was flung across the room and landed in a heap.

As Shaun lay moaning in agony the woman strode over to him and stood with her feet either side of him.

Shaun wheezed, “Fuck you, bitch...”

The woman sighed. “Shaun, when I said you need to leave I meant my body is so tricked out with genetic and technological advancements that your primitiveness stood out like a sore thumb. I bet you aren’t even backed up yet. You’re so ridiculously fragile and delicate I am frankly surprised you got this far. Leave!”

Shaun stared at her. “How do you know my name?”

The woman laughed. “There aren’t many stupid enough to walk into a vampire bar without the most basic of upgrades. Unless they were say recommended to go there by their trusted tour guide Sylph?”

Shaun stared. “You’re Diana?”

Diana rolled her eyes. “And you have 3 broken ribs. I’ve been numbing the pain as best I can but you need help. Then we can talk.”

Shaun nodded.

“Mitch, you got them-?” Before she could finish asking for them the barman threw a small plastic container to her. Diana unscrewed the lid, pulled out a pill and handed it to Shaun.

Shaun swallowed the pill and almost instantly felt better. “W-What was that?”

Diana shrugged. “Basic nanobots. By our standards as good as taking painkillers, by yours as good as becoming Captain America. Now lets talk properly shall we?”

Diana offered a hand to help him up then led him over to her table.

Shaun grimaced at the half eaten bloody corpse on the table.

Diana caught his look. “Oh, don’t worry. Guy backed himself up and incorporated the memories of the event.”

“Right...” said Shaun. “Getting to the point at hand though, how do you know, Sammy?”

The barman arrived with a gold goblet of red stuff. “For the good sir.”

Shaun recoiled. “That’s blood, actual human blood.”

The barman shrugged. “Actually it’s vat grown human blood mixed with alcohol, sweeteners and fluidic redistribution agents but yes, this is a vampire bar, we serve blood.”

“Okay...” Shaun tried a sip then moaned. “Oh god, it’s good!”

Everyone at the table laughed.

Diana sipped her pint then said. “I knew Samsquela because we hunted together. She was my best friend. I hope she still is.”

Shaun have her a nervous look.

“Oh, don’t misunderstand me, Samsquela always had her heart set on being a Sylph and she would bore me for hours about the lives and personalities of her prospective masters and mistresses but being a Sylph Agent for the Interference wing of Pam Goat is not easy. I mean they kidnap people on the moment of death then bring them here. The Sylphs of Interference are the linchpins of very difficult operations. They have to be clever and smart to fly the SEGHATs and effectively negotiate saving of their masters and mistresses while simultaneously faking their deaths and they need to be capable of the kind of social gymnastics to get the people they’ve saved home to here safely and then there’s the really difficult bit. They need to be at once tough enough to do all this and manage immigration bureaucracy while also melting away into being a subservient plaything in time for their master and mistress to feel like they have actual agency and aren’t just refugees in a strange land.”

Shaun stared into the bottom of his glass as he thought. “So she hunted with you to get

tough enough to last?”

Diana nodded. “Well that and it’s something I’ve observed myself in hunts. The ones who don’t run and don’t put up a fight, they’re dangerous. When your back’s against the wall you give everything you can for the slightest ounce of survival. If someone saves it then that’s dangerous. I mean if you save your strength for when the predator is actually biting down upon you you could genuinely do some serious damage and hinder their ability to feed. So as the predator I always prefer the prey that fights with every last ounce of strength they have, then they won’t have any left to stop me tearing their throat out. I think Samsquela craved that moment of utter helplessness and knew that to earn it she first had to have all the fight taken out her.”

“And then she sent me to you.” said Shaun.

“Yeah that’s strange.” said Diana. “I thought I wouldn’t hear from her again, that she was riding off into the sunset. Happily ever after.”

Shaun thought for a second. “She sent me here because she thought I might enjoy the game. It’s just possible she realized that me and you might get along and I can’t imagine anybody wouldn’t like the significant people in their lives to get along.”

“So you really want a game then?” asked Diana curiously.

“I think I owe it to her to at least try.” said Shaun.

Diana thought for a second. “I suppose I do know of a sector of cattle who have been playing this game for a while. They should be experienced enough to take you down without hurting you.”

“Cheers for the vote of confidence.” said Shaun.

Diana studied Shaun thoughtfully. “I suppose you could prove a useful distraction provided we can make you fly. You’d be dead in seconds on the ground.” She called out across the room. “Hogarth, do you still have one of those AG units!?”

A burly man with grey hair called back. “Aye! And I have a malfunctioning autoloading crossbow that could serve the cause.”

Shaun grimaced. “A crossbow? I was told I wouldn’t need to actually kill anyone.”

Diana stared at him, incredulous. “You’re an unaugmented basic human with no prior combat experience firing into a crowd as you fly via AG. Don’t worry, you won’t hit anyone and even if you do you are the only person in the game without a backup and if you’re worried about just hurting someone we have that blanked out too.”

“Okay.” said Shaun. “I’m game.”

“Hang on.” said Diana. “We need to plan, you aren’t heading out there alone.”

*

Shaun stood atop a castle tower. Diana, Hogarth and as many vampires as they could

muster stood around him. Shaun was covered in the inch thick gel membrane of a crash protection suit. Worn like a backpack was his anti gravity generator.

Hogarth handed Shaun the crossbow. “Now the timing is shot and the loading screws up the aim everytime but you don’t need to worry about all that, just point at your target, pull the trigger and move onto the next target. Remember drop it only when you have sight of someone to surrender to.”

“And in the unlikely event that you do get one of them, pull out the sampler, touch the needle to bare flesh and press the button, the Severed Artery will have a steak ready in five minutes.” said Diana.

“Okay.” said Shaun, before he took a deep breath. “Lets do this.”

Diana gently pushed him off the roof.

Shaun flew. He flew across the town and made a beeline for an open market. Men and women stood around, dressed as for a spring fair, all pastels, shorts and skirts.

Shaun tried to fire a couple of warning shots and 3 people dropped to the ground.

He was getting closer now, close enough to identify individuals. There were twenty still standing. They hadn’t identified him yet. Clearly ‘Noob with an Anti-gravity harness and a shitty crossbow’ was too stupid a plan to prepare for. He felt mildly annoyed by that and fired: One, two. One, two. This of course meant nothing in practical terms as the crossbow loaded however often it damn well liked and indeed Shaun saw it fire five bolts at the body builder tanning in the sun, all of which missed but it kept shaun focused on the game at hand. One, two. One, two.

Now he could see their faces and they could clearly see him. They weren’t reacting though. They were frozen in place, just staring at him, unable to comprehend the stupidity of what he was doing.

Shaun moved onto his next target: One, two. He fired another second and another. He wanted her. She was tall with short cropped blonde hair, a red leather jacket, a tanktop and a short pink skirt. Something within him wanted her with the same instinctual force as he normally wanted pretzels but it was more than just hunger or lust. It was staying up late playing video games and hovering a little too long over a dead npc because you should have saved her.

Shaun refocused his flight pattern and fired at her in a continuous burst of fire.

Joanna Montague-Razpief stood looking at her friends, they were all stunned. Their acute senses and probability calculations paralysing them as they tried to map the danger onto a 4 dimensional probability representation and thus take the best course of action. Every shot changed the calculation and stacked with the rest of the data to change the best course of action. Rabbits in the headlights too stupid to move. A bolt embedded itself in her arm. Fuck the probability scale, she was running and she knew just where too.

The pack of vampires descended. The cattle impaled by crossbows, blasted by buckshot or caught in nets. The cattle weren’t dead of course but they were incapacitated and slowed. Meaning that Diana and her lieutenants had time to clean up the stragglers who

started running when they descended.

The sunburnt body builder broke free from his net to find everyone at the market down on the ground and 11 vampires restraining them, ready to be taken back to the Severed Artery for eating. He picked up a crossbow and aimed.

Diana smiled back. “Don’t even think about it motherfucker.”

The bodybuilder dropped the crossbow and Diana descended on him.

Shaun zoomed after his prey. He kept his crossbow locked on her as he matched pace with her. He didn’t want to catch her, not yet. Let his prey tire herself out running and keep rolling the dice with his crossbow, eventually enough of the fuckers had to hit to seriously weaken and slow down the fleeing woman.

After rounding several corners and heading through back alleys his prey was caught in a dead end.

Shaun descended.

She started crawling up a drainpipe.

Shaun was too low and tried using his crossbow as an extra reverse thruster. The bolts shattered the bottom of the pipe.

Shaun rose above her and tried using the crossbow as a club with which to hit her head. He missed. Hit the drain pipe instead and accidentally fired a crossbow bolt through her hand and then his foot.

Jo could feel the drainpipe giving away beneath her and so threw herself backwards off the wall, caught onto her pursuer with her good hand, flung herself onto his back, stood up then jumped up the wall, fell over it and hit the ground with a thump.

She pulled out a couple of keys from her jacket pocket and winced as she lifted the man hole cover clear then jumped through.

Shaun cursed. Clearly nanobots weren’t as effective as painkillers after all, still the wound was sterile and the nanobots could probably be trusted to heal the flesh around the bolt to prevent infection but that was really annoying. Anyway where had his prey gone? He rose up for a better view and saw the open man hole.

“There’s always a sewer level.” He muttered.

Jo thought for a moment that she might have lost him but then a crossbow bolt slammed into her other hand. She grimaced. This next part was not going to be fun.

Shaun rocketed after his prey. She was so close now. If he could only- She vanished. Had he over shot her? He doubled back, no. He recalled a particularly funny moment involving the Vicar of Dibley and his heart sank. His prey probably had oxygen generators in her cheeks or gills or something. He would have to just hold his breath and pray she wasn’t trying to drown him but was actually headed somewhere.

He sank down into the river of shit until he found the pipe heading down. He headed up for one more breath of air then had the Anti-Gravity unit sink him down like a stone. He wondered, could you get the bends in shit and if so would the nanobots deal with it?

Shaun followed the tunnel until it met a wider storm drain. He wiped his mouth then took a deep breath before wiping his face and looking around, hovering above the water currents, a shitty hand print indicated the way and Shaun rocketed after his prey once more.

A crossbow bolt hit her in her left thigh. ‘Persistent fucker’ thought Jo as she unlocked the secret entrance to her hide out. She supposed that after following her through a river of shit, her attacker deserved to catch a break. She left the door open and turned on the shower. She had designed it to clean an entire underground resistance cell moving at speed and she was clean by the time she left it, next an arrangement of dehumidifiers and fans dried her. Jo decided to leave both of these on, no need for her attacker to be covered in shit when she killed him. She headed for the armory.

Shaun found the shower and bathed with relief. The turned off his Anti-Gravity unity and just enjoying the cleaning from the perfectly hot water, then he strode through the drying room.

“Thank you for the shower!” He called. “Look I’m sorry about this! I don’t know why I chose you, but I did and I intend to get you! I won’t hurt you! I just want to take a dna sample!”

She was waiting for him in the rec room, holding a pool cue and wearing a long black coat. She looked him in the eyes. “You’ve done pretty well for an idiot. Who are you?”

Shaun coughed. “Dead. I died yesterday at a convention having sex with the love of my life and then I’m here in this world and this woman I barely know suggests I try out this vampire game. I have no backups, no upgrades, no weapons worth a damn. I just need you. To have meaningful power over something, anything.”

“Over me?” said Jo sadly. “Yet again man’s self worth is defined as power over women. For what it’s worth I am Joanna Montague-Razpief. I have been playing this game for five years and I was born here. I could probably crush your skull into ash if I felt like it. Take my advice and surrender, I could hurt you.”

“Nice to meet you Joanna” said Shaun. “But I intend to win and I do not respond well to threats.”

Shaun dropped to the floor and slalomed towards her, firing straight ahead.

“Fuck.” said Jo as she pulled out her machine guns and started firing. She hoped to scare the fucker into submission.

The legs of the pool tables collapsed when hit by stray crossbow bolts, the balls poured out onto the floor around Jo. A bolt hit her leg and she turned to run but fell over the balls as her guns flew across the room.

Shaun was upon her in an instant. Firing at so close a range he could not miss he pinned his prey to the ground. First the feet, then the legs, abdomen, chest and arms. He pointed the crossbow squarely at her forehead. He pleaded. “Surrender. I don’t want to kill you.”

“You won’t.” said Jo as she pulled her right arm free and snatched the crossbow from him.

Shaun jetted towards her fallen machine guns.

Jo aimed carefully with the crossbow and missed every single shot.

Shaun retrieved the machine guns.

Jo had gotten to her feet and stood looking at Shaun as he bore down on her. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. She cried out. “You won’t kill me, you don’t have the guts!”

“Correct.” said Shaun. “But I don’t need to kill you. I just need to make you want the pain to stop. After all we have established that you have the advantage over me. Upgraded as fuck. I can barely slow you down. So I have a proposition. You were kind enough to let me in here, let me shower. You drop that crossbow and I’ll repay that kindness by letting you escape, even shut off your shower for you. I won’t stop chasing you, you understand. I will find you and I will get you but you will at least have a chance to get out of here and lose me. A head start shall we say?”

“How do I know I can trust you?” asked Jo pointedly.

Shaun laughed. “Because you know that your only other options are surrender or try to fight a man armed with two machine guns and the desperation mortality brings while you are armed with a shitty crossbow.”

“You’d do it?” asked Jo “You’d really let me go? Even when I’m unarmed? I thought you wanted me?”

Shaun nodded. “I do, there’s something about you. You’re too good for a place like this. The other vampires, they’d tear you to shreds. I won’t let that happen. You deserve a more peaceful exit to the game.”

“Then why don’t I just stroll up to you and pop you in the head?” asked Jo.

“Because if I die I cease to exist. If you die, you respawn. And anyway a couple of bullets is a damn sight more merciful a death than what the other vampires would grant you.” said Shaun.

“Okay.” said Jo warily. “You’ve convinced me”

Jo lowered the crossbow and headed to the exit onto street level, shadowed the entire way by Shaun. Once she was through the door she started sprinting.

Shaun casually flew back down to pick up the crossbow and turn off the shower/dryer then headed out the exit, flew up high and found her.

He darted towards her, matched pace five meters behind her and said almost casually “You know I watched a Doctor Who episode once. Its a scifi show featuring a time travelling alien but that’s beside the point. There were these dustbins having a war with a bunch of mop people. Both sides were equally matched and controlled by perfect computers. They were at a stalemate, doing the tactical equivalent of predator and prey cha chaing around a cylinder, always in perfect cover, always unable to find the other.

Then this idiot comes along who isn't perfect and he bumbles along barely surviving, screwing up everyone's plans because the idiot is so mad and stupid he's unpredictable."

Jo was running, unsure where to. She felt like leading Shaun to the base of cattle operations, let the fucker deal with fifty heavily armed troops. Except that felt a little like leading a shark into shallow water, sure you might drown it but now it can kill everyone else. Maybe she should find a different vampire just to deny him the joy of taking her out of the game. Except A. That was certain painful death over a possible peaceful exit and B. the fucker might even refuse to kill her but instead merely restrain her. Offering her the choice of a bullet to the brain or surrender.

She called back "So you're this Doctor then? The great spanner in the works?"

Shaun laughed "I like that, I might have to keep that. Shaun Emmanuel - The Spanner In The Works. Got a nice ring to it don't you think? What I mean though is that you play offensively or defensively. Everyone is evenly matched and can work out the best scenario to take. Me? I don't have a clue, I am improvising all the time, doing the best for me at any given moment and as I am quite a stupid man, that isn't always the obvious thing. My crossbow as well. Fucked aim. The best marksman in the land would miss every shot with this. I however am an idiot with poor hand eye coordination flying through the air. When you had my crossbow you were aiming it so perfectly that anything less than a natural twenty would miss. I have far lower ambitions and so I only need a 15 to hit and I am not just rolling the dice of the crossbow but the dice of my hands and my eyes and my flight I get minor successes far more often than you ever could."

Jo laughed and started choking, she slowed and coughed then started running again. "If I had just run from you in the rec room you wouldn't have been able to hit me, would you?"

"Probably not." admitted Shaun.

"And I could have then gotten to the weapon room grabbed my own gun and then we would be evenly matched and thus you would have had to surrender?" said Jo, getting tired now.

"Most likely." said Shaun.

Jo chuckled. "You knew all of this didn't you? Your offer of chivalry to let me get a head start so you wouldn't be forced to kill me? That was you getting me out of my domain? Making me run out onto the street defenceless before I could rearm?"

Shaun sighed. "The thought may have run through my head, yeah... So long as you keep running I can keep rolling the dice on my crossbow here and you will continue to tire out until I have you at my mercy."

"Checkmate." said Jo and she stopped running.

Shaun coasted to a halt beside her.

"Now." said Jo. "Do you want me to break your skull into ash?"

Shaun raised the two machine guns and rested a barrel on each of her breasts. "You were saying?"

Jo laughed. “Mother fucker you don’t give up do you?”

“Neither do you.” said Shaun with a smile. “A worthy adversary indeed.”

Jo sighed. “So what happens now?”

Shaun reached into his pocket and pulled out something that looked like a pen, he pressed the tip against her neck and pressed the button. “Game over.”

“Are you happy now?” asked Jo dryly. “You have successfully hunted down a woman? Congratulations.”

Shaun laughed. “It’s all in the game. It could just as easily have been Diana that took you out of it.”

Jo stared at him. “You know Diana, the vampire princess?”

“Yeah.” said Shaun casually. “Want to meet her?”

“I’ve been running in fear of her for five years” said Jo.

“Yeah and now you’re out of the game we’re going to eat you at the Severed Artery. It’s only right that you join us.” said Shaun cheerfully.

“So you want me to go with you to the home of the vampires and eat myself?” said Jo. “You really are mad”

“You coming or what?” asked Shaun, failing to see her point.

“How?”

*

Shaun arrived at the top of the castle tower, Jo clinging to his back. They headed downstairs into the keep and then into the Severed Artery.

Shaun entered first, to cheering, Diana got up from her seat and raised a goblet towards him “Hail Shaun Emmanuel - The Spanner In The Works!”

Everyone in the pub chanted “Hail Shaun Emmanuel - The Spanner In The Works!”

Diana put down her goblet and approached Shaun “You did a very good thing today, Shaun. Thanks to you a lot of very dangerous cattle have been put to slaughter. Your distraction was exactly what we needed. And you actually got out of there alive. Amazing.”

Shaun smiled and opened the door behind him, took Jo’s hand and led her in “My hunt was actually fairly successful in itself.”

Diana beamed and studied Jo intently as she stroked her cheek “My, what a prize. I’ve been after this one for a long time. Very smart and very prepared. You clearly had quite the time getting her if all these wounds mean anything.”

Jo swallowed. “He was a most worthy opponent. I am only thankful that he does not want me harmed.”

Diana chuckled. “You didn’t hunt her did you? You saved her? Yes, I’ve known people who do that. What is it you wish to do with her?”

“Well we came here to eat.” said Shaun, not understanding the question.

Diana laughed. “No, I’m not referring to the game. I mean what do you want to do with her, what are your intentions towards her?”

“My girlfriend is waiting for me at home.” said Shaun.

Diana looked aghast. “Heaven forbid but what I am saying is that you have taken her out of the game, her home of some many years. She has of course all the right to do whatever she wants, as we all do, but that is rather a big decision to have suddenly dropped onto you. She could naturally just reenter the game but then I would only tear her throat out and render your victory obsolete. She could become a Sylph, join dear little Sammy at home.”

“Fuck.” said Shaun quietly. “Kirstin really won’t like this.”

Diana smiled sympathetically. “Look I didn’t mean to spook you but it is something that needs to be thought about. I’ll leave you to decide over dinner.”

Diana walked away.

Jo squeezed Shaun’s hand. “Lets get a table shall we?”

Shaun and Jo sat at the end of a table and were each served some breast meat with roast potatoes, parsnips, carrots broccoli, cauliflower and gravy. The food was nice if disquieting in its ordinariness.

“My breasts are quite nice don’t you think?” said Jo cheerily. “I wonder if they’ll let us have a leg?”

Shaun stared at her.

Jo called out to a waiter. “Oy mush, the hunter of this fair cattle would like a leg if there’s one spare!?”

The waiter arrived in a moment. “Here you are, Sir, Diana has the other leg. The head will be stuffed and mounted for delivery to your house next Tuesday. Her blood is now always on tap to you, Sir.”

Jo grinned, gravy dribbling down her chin.

Shaun felt sick.

Jo saw his face and said. “Look, I have an idea. We go home as friends, I’ll sleep on your couch or whatever and you can decide tomorrow?”

Shaun could not believe her attitude. “I thought you were a feminist, making a big deal about how it was wrong for me to hunt you down and now you’re letting me govern the very course of your life?”

Jo laughed. “It’s all in the game. You were spieling about how you just wanted to save me so I called you a chauvinistic prick.”

“I was pouring my hear out to you?” said Shaun, incredulous.

“And I wasn’t wrong.” said Jo. “But that doesn’t change the fact that we are immortal and live in the multiversal after life where everyone can do what they want. I still have my agency, I’ll still say no if I dislike what you say but you beat me despite all the odds against you and I respect that. So I’ll hear you out and if I like the sound of it I may even do it.”

Shaun sighed. “You want to know what I want, what I really want, what I have spent my whole life wanting?”

“I’m listening.” said Jo.

“A best friend. Someone who wouldn’t tell me I’m boring if I get depressed, someone who won’t pull my pants down in the middle of PE or vanish with my old computer. Someone who will stick with me through the good and the bad and the dull.” said Shaun.

Jo hugged Shaun. “You got it but I still need an actual answer.”

The waiter arrived, “Sir, the lady Diana wished me to deliver this present to you. She says she hopes you’ll know what to do.”

Shaun glared at him and said icily. “Thank you. Tell her she’s welcome round mine any time.”

The waiter needed curtly and left.

Shaun opened the small coffin shaped box, wrapped by a red ribbon. He leaned back and sighed.

Jo reached into the box and pulled out a collar with her name on it and started laughing. Then she pulled the emerald green bikini and held it up for size. “That woman may be the spawn of Satan but she does know a good bikini. What do you reckon?”

Shaun glared at her. “You’re loving this, aren’t you?”

“Of course.” said Jo with a smirk. “A vampire who can’t stand the consequences of winning? Hilarious. I wonder if Diana will let me join you on hunts? Be your little sniffer dog?”

Shaun shook his head then rested it on the table.

The waiter arrived with dessert. “Ice cream made using the milk of the kill, sweetened with her blood and topped with honey cured bacon made from her flesh.”

“Oh goody!” said Jo.

Shaun grimaced. “Do you have anything not made from human?”

“We have lamb’s blood, Sir.” said the waiter.

Shaun smacked his head on the table. Jo ate his dessert.

“And now a toast!” cried Diana.

Shaun jerked to attention.

“A toast to the Lady Joanne Montague - Razpief!” cried Diana.

The inn was silent now and Diana was looking right at Jo.

“She has played the game of vampires for five years now. Valiantly defending the cattle from our attacks, letting the population boom with bright young things. We eat well tonight because of her actions, because she defended the cattle against us so well and for so long. It will be sad to see her go, not least because she goes still living into the outside world and I had rather hoped to tear her throat out.”

Cheering erupted among the vampires. Diana waited for it to die down then continued “In all seriousness though the game is only fun for us if the cattle give us a challenge. Jo gave us more than a challenge. She changed the game. A truly worthy adversary. Her head will hang in the halls of the fallen forever, just as it will at the home of the person who got her for us. Jo, may I say from all of us, thank you for playing! It was a pleasure hunting you and I hope Shaun will do the smart thing and bring you back as a hunting dog! You’re too good at this game to stay away forever! In any case we will remember you!”

Now Jo cried. The weight of everything that had happened falling upon her in an instant. Her life as she had known it for the last five years was over.

Shaun felt awful, truly despicably awful. This was just a game to him and now he had ruined this woman’s life. He hugged her. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.”

Jo looked up at him, snot streaming from her nose. “Can we go home?”

“Yes.” said Shaun, now fully prepared to keep this woman as a Sylph for as long as she wanted, as recompense for his crime.

*

Chapter 4
Rebirth

They arrived at Shaun’s house and entered into the estate. He led her wordlessly to the recreation of his house and his bedroom. Kirstin was lying on the bed, Sammy curled up beside her.

“How did everything go?” asked Shaun.

“Oh brilliantly.” said Kirstin cheerily. “It was really quick and painless. Sammy collected me

and we've been talking about all the possibilities this presents us. I think I might join the mages guild, apparently they can hack the logic of reality to create lightning and shit. What have you been doing and who's she?"

"I um joined the vampire guild." said Shaun sheepishly. "I err sort of er- "

Jo sighed. "Your boyfriend hunted me down and made me surrender. Since my life of five years is at an end the idea is that he gets to say what happens next."

Kirstin laughed. "Oh, Shaun, it's all right. You don't have to look so downtrodden. I am not going to yell at you because you won yourself a goldfish at the fair."

Shaun stared at her, expressionless.

Jo answered. "Well, Diana did seem to think I should be his Sylph which I would be totally cool with but equally I'll do whatever you guys think is best."

Sammy cried. "Diana thinks you should be a Sylph!?" She looked at Kirstin. "Please, please, please."

Shaun said carefully. "Jo has been fighting vampires for five years, she is quite capable of making her own decisions."

Jo nodded. "He's right, I am, and I choose to be your Sylph."

"Very well then." said Kirstin happily. "I have no problem with it."

All three women looked to him. "Fine, I will keep the woman I hunted down as a pet, just don't say this was my idea. Now would you move? I want to play Dragon Age Inquisition."

"There isn't room" said Kirstin.

"Hold on." said Sammy. "Computer extend house as necessary, extend bed to comfortably seat 4 people and add extra pillows to compensate."

The bed and the room stretched to accommodate 4 people.

"Ooh!" said Kirstin, impressed.

Jo climbed onto the bed and almost immediately Sammy was playing with her hair. Jo asked. "So when should I take the Sylph pill?"

"The paperwork has to be done first" said Sammy.

Shaun groaned and turned on his computer.

*

The receptionist called his name and Shaun Emmanuel was led into the Integration Office. There he was greeted by a short black man in a suit.

"Mr Emmanuel, allow me to introduce myself. I am Rajesh Mihmood Birroundi, I have lived

in the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association for 200 years now, served in the Integration Office for 50 of those years. It suits me, how is everything suiting you?”

Shaun smiled sadly. “Well I was kidnapped, confronted with the unavoidable fact of multiverse travel, gifted a woman in a manner that caused trouble in my relationship then yesterday I played a game and hunted a woman after which time I got to eat her flesh and keep her as a pet. I am not all told doing amazingly.”

Rajesh smiled. “Yes I saw your Sylphs outside, very beautiful. You’re quite lucky.”

“How?” asked Shaun.

“Pardon?” said Rajesh.

Shaun looked meaningfully at the man. “I can’t fuck them, I don’t know them. It’s been quite pointed out that their being my Sylphs does not mean they won’t do whatever the fuck they like. What I have Rajesh is two adult women to clothe and feed until fuck knows when.”

“Yes but aren’t I right in thinking that in your world people have cats and dogs and hamsters and things?” asked Rajesh.

“Well, yes.” said Shaun. “But that’s different. Pets need their owner to survive, they are utterly dependent and raised from babies. They are part of the family.”

“And how are your Sylphs different? Do you find their capacity of clearly and distinctly expressing what they think annoying?” asked Rajesh.

“Well no. Cats are perfectly capable of that. What I mean is that they are people. You can’t own people.” said Shaun.

Rajesh frowned. “Shaun, I do not wish to get off on the wrong foot with you but when we made farming illegal on the basis that it was an immoral and unnecessary practise in the age of vat grown food we decided that we could only accept keeping pets in all good conscience if we could allow it to apply to people too. Now your Sylphs are willing pets of yours, that is a huge compliment and here you are slagging them off as a burden.”

Shaun frowned. “I know. I feel so awful, I mean I keep fucking everything up. If the tumblrites could see me now they would crucify me.”

“Only the willing are crucified in the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association” said Rajesh pointedly before he changed the subject. “Do you know how our economy works here, Shaun?”

“No.” admitted Shaun. “I had this vague idea that you were all past money as a concept but I am about to go to the petshop with the girls...”

“Oh, I didn’t mean to spook you.” said Rajesh “Within a square billion universes you and your family won’t need to pay money or barter. I merely wish to explain some things to you. Everyone who dies enters the heaven of the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association and can do whatever the fuck they like. Most keep on doing basically the same thing. You may be immortal and in a post scarcity society but you still need to feel like you are doing

something with your life. The jobs you want tend to be the ones you are good at and those tend to be the ones you get. There is usually more than enough slack in the system to make up for those who don't. Occasionally Interference will duplicate particularly skilled and enthusiastic workers and dot them about wherever they are needed. The individual generally doesn't realize what's happened and everything runs smoothly. There are times though when robots can't do a job for whatever reason and duplicating a person would get a little complicated. Then the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association opens the gates of heaven and says 'Hi, we are as gods to you, we need some waiters. Let us have some and they will be well looked after in heaven and we will help you out.'"

Shaun stared at Rajesh. "I'm not sure I like where this is going?"

Rajesh continued. "When the Pan Multiverse Good Time Assocation needs to pay its debts it calls Interference and Interference interferes. I am afraid Shaun that you and Kirstin the result of Interference."

"Right..." said Shaun. "See when I came in here I thought you were going to give me a pill filled with techno gubbins then give me a citizenship test and now you're telling me... What?"

"You are the reincarnation of an eldritch being from before the dawn of the multiverse known as the Farsh-nuke." said Rajesh, perfectly seriously. "You are to aid in the fight against the Septagonoids alongside the United Civilisations of the Multiverse and the Logicios." Then he pulled a bottle of pills and a business card from his pocket "Now take one of these every day until you run out and call this number if you ever need anything that can't be gotten easily like a sylph or a cat."

Shaun stared at him, mouth open. Utter shock.

Rajesh smiled thinly. "Buy your girls some trinkets, Shaun, indulge them, play with them, enjoy them."

Shaun picked up the bottle and business card and left.

*

Kirstin stood on a dreary street in the center of town, looking at a statue. The plaque read:

"This statue was built to commemorate the founding of the Mages Guild and depicts the Great Farsh-nuke as he was at the founding."

The man depicted in the statue was charmingly overweight, smiling with mischievous glee as he waved a screwdriver in the air with his right hand. In his left was a - partially obscured for copyright purposes - 2 liter bottle of Diet Coke. The man wore a frock coat with an elaborate septagonal design over it, a pin striped waistcoat, a shirt with septagons engraved on the collars and a paisley tie. The shoes looked to be a pair of brogues.

Kirstin marveled at the statue, unable to believe such a man really existed. She was also more than a little unsure what she was supposed to do. This was meant to be the gate to the Mages Guild after all. She wondered aloud "Is there a button? A lever? A hidden panel?"

“No.” said the bronze statue of the Great Farsh-nuke. “I founded this guild, I stand as Guardian. If you wish to enter you have but to ask and prove yourself worthy.”

Kirstin farted. “Holy Crap!” then she composed herself. “What happens if I prove unworthy?”

The statue smiled, showing off its teeth “Are you sure want to know? I don’t want to give you nightmares.”

Kirstin froze, she stared at it, swallowed and responded carefully. “Am I worthy?”

“Of course.” said the statue then he removed a tennis ball sized sphere from his jacket pocket and threw it at Kirstin.

*

Kirstin stood in a great arched entryway looking at five armored gargoyles. She looked down and saw that she was standing on a pressure plate. She sighed and stepped off it. The room shifted about her and now she was looking at a young man in a tight shirt and collar. The collar read: ‘Daffy’

Kirstin frowned.

“You’re here for the Mages Guild right?” said Daffy. “Sorry about the palaver but we are naturally used to dark lords trying to run amok. I am the receptionist and bodyguard.”

“And Sylph?” asked Kirstin curiously.

Daffy smiled. “You must be new here in more ways than one. Yes I am a Sylph. I attended the guild when I was seventeen, got into a bit of a whirlwind romance with this really clever girl in my year. She collared me on my eighteenth birthday and then the ‘thing’ happened. I was taken out of the guild, dissected, analysed then finally bought back to serve in my position now because my condition was rather useful as a bodyguard.”

“Right...” said Kirstin uncertainly. “Now may I?”

“Go into the guild? Yes I think so. Hold on.” Daffy reached down beneath his desk and -

Kirstin was standing in a great entry hall now, students milling about her. Some were as young as five, some looked to be eighty. A strong muscular hand gripped hers. “Walk quickly and don’t trip.”

Kirstin walked with the hand through the throng and down corridors until it led her through an open door into an empty classroom. Now Kirstin could see who the hand belonged to.

He was a tall man with short cropped hair and wore a battered leather jacket, a green jumper and jeans.

“Allow me to introduce myself” said the man. “I am Professor Septimus Occularis Bromaljion. I teach Religious and Mythological Magic.”

Kirstin squinted at him. “Don’t I know you from somewhere?”

Septimus chuckled and closed the door. “You’re in the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association, there’s going to be doubles of everyone. I might die at the heads of a psychopath who used to do the full monty and you might kiss spiderman but that doesn’t alter our lives as they are now. I do have one very important question for you: Why might a strange man single you out in the crowd and lead you to an empty classroom?”

“Fuck.” said Kirstin as terror suddenly struck her. “You’re going to try and rape me aren’t you?”

Septimus locked the door and turned to her aghast. “No! Rapists ply their trade in the designated presumed consent zones. I am a professor of mythology and you are a creature of mythology.”

“What?”

Septimus said. “You know like when you first got here, you had a leaflet and it opened with a quote?”

“In the beginning there was nothing but that meant no logic and without logic nothing can be anything.” said Kirstin.

Septimus nodded. “Well remembered.” Then he headed to the teacher’s desk and explained as he went “Well it’s not like all this appeared in a puff of logic. It evolved from the earliest crudest pseudo logic to become this and along the way it made mistakes, aberrations that don’t make sense logically. Many of these aberrations were just abstract strings of logic or proto-universes that collapsed but some of the links in the chain were proto-universes made with enough abstract strings that they stuck around and evolved over an unspeakably vast period of time, gaining sensation, feelings, intellect and imagination.”

Kirstin started to see where this was going. “But these creatures weren’t built within a pre-existing self contained logical framework, like a universe? They were built in the nothingness, a place that must be as anathema to logical life forms as the void of space is to carbon life forms. A creature that had evolved to live in space would be by the standards of carbon life forms unspeakably tough and strange, thus these strange proto life forms would be as gods to the early multiverse.”

Septimus beamed. “Exactly, well done!” Then he thumbed through a book until he found the right page and handed it to her “The Great Septarchy. From Right to Left that’s Spring-Heeled-Jack, The Bam-Kursh, The Farsh-nuke, Viorum Kaztif-Tan, Galla Placidia, Gfaxxy Quluwmcy and Pacifus Subis.”

Kirstin stared as realization dawned “Septimus, I really hope you’re saying I am Pacifus Subis because if it’s not that then I may have to punch you in the face.”

Septimus decided it might be prudent to stroll to the other end of the room. “In universes they see life as binary: Black or white. Good or Bad. Guilty or innocent. On or off. Male or female. If one of those binary definitions does not fit you must be the other but this is the Spectrum represented in the evolution of logic:

Spring-Heeled-Jack. A man utterly insane and completely immoral, willing to rape, destroy and desecrate without a seconds thought.

The Bam-Kursh. A man who wants nothing but complete dominion over all to make all the nothingness his toys but capable of great kindness, compassion and respect for equality.

The Farsh-nuke. A man who is obsessed Sylphs and with women in particular. In some instances able to create vast conspiracies to subjugate women out of his fear of their power and his lust for their flesh. Yet this man is also the Unleasher the woman who represents exactly the sort of hyper moral woman he lusted after. This is also the man who founded the Mages Guild and the Logicios and to this day wages war against the Sptagonoids - Logic's own antibodies come to sterilise the nothingness.

Galla Placidia. A woman whose true power can only be speculated at and avoided destruction by hiding in the genetic code of every woman alive. She is ruthless, cunning, manipulative and sadistic yet always on the side of the survival of life and the multiverse.

Gfaxxy Quluwmcy. A woman whose unwillingness to interfere directly for fear of denying social and political agency has arguably killed many people or allowed them to suffer but someone who can and will make others in the Septarchy serve the greater good.

Pacifus Subis. A woman so moral and pacifistic noone knows anything about her.

Then in the center Viorum Kaztif-Tan. A being who straddles the line. As a man Viorum is a destructive, indulgent, chaotic anti-authority while being authority. As a woman Viorum is passive, moral, restrained respectful of authority while humbly absolving herself of it.

Tell me Kirstin, who do you think you most reflect?"

Kirstin flipped a table and charged at him. "You cunt! I am a woman!"

Septimus swallowed then shouted back at her. "You are the reincarnation of Viorum! That is why you are here!"

Kirstin collapsed and wept. "I thought all that was behind me, that I had found my prince charming and it was all going to be happily ever after. Yet Edmund hangs over me like a shadow."

"Sorry." said Septimus weakly. "But it gets worse."

Kirstin screamed at him. "How!? How could it possibly get any worse!?"

Septimus sighed. "Your prince is the Farsh-nuke and you are to wage war against the Septagonoids."

Kirstin glared at him. "You are kidding, right? This must be some kind of cruel joke?"

Septimus shrugged. "'Fraid not. You are Viorum, Shaun is the Farsh-nuke and you both need to wage war. Now the headmistress is about to begin the opening speech, lets go."

Kirstin took a deep breath, wiped her face with a hanky and got up to follow Septimus.

*

Kirstin entered the assembly hall and Septimus mounted the stage. A teacher dressed all in grey with a beard so long it was used as a scarf declared. “Now that Septimus has joined us we can finally begin. I am Headmistress Seany Von Ubershmerfs and I have to say something now that you may not like. Magic is not real. Fairies are not real. Goblins and trolls and orcs are not real. Dragons most definitely do not exist and every religion out there is a phony cult built on lies, delusion and exploitation. The only thing that is real is science.”

The crowd seemed stunned, as if to say. ‘But this is the Mages Guild and we want to be wizards, are you punking us?’

The Headmistress continued. “That does not mean however that we are not wizards just because we understand the science behind what we do. Fact: There are beings from before the dawn of the mutiverse with staggering power who walk among us now. Fact: We each carry with us an intangible extension of our existence within another plane of reality that is in many crucial ways the core of our identity and it can transcend into an afterlife or allow us to be reborn. Fact: We hold within all of us here the power to do things the bards of old would declare could only be possible via magic. Fact: There are naturally evolved creatures in the multiverse who fit many of the characteristics of Fairies, Goblins, Trolls and Orcs. Fact: You will each live in the Mages Guild with your own dragon.”

The crowd cheered.

“Now I think it might be wise if your teachers introduced themselves.” said the Headmistress before sitting down.

A short slender woman with brown hair stood up first. “Hi, I am Professor Imelda Honeyblossom and I teach Metamorphosis.”

Septimus stood up next and introduced himself. “I am Professor Septimus Occularis Bromaljion. I teach Religious and Mythological Magic.”

A short dark skinned woman stood up next. “Hi, I’m Mariam Korsandi, I teach Care and After Care of Magical Creatures.”

A tall burly man with a vague halo of grey hair stood up next. “I am Frank and I will be teaching Black Smithing and Enchanting.”

A tall slender blonde woman stood up next. “I am Haley and I will be teaching basically the dark arts. We’re talking killing via spooky action at a distance, torture, rituals, sacrifice, raising the dead, summoning and trapping demons, love potions and sadistic hypnotism.”

A fat old woman with grey hair crocheting a scarf stood up next. “I’m Agnis, I teach alchemy. From how to brew beer in an instant to how to turn hydrogen into carbon. I am in short where you go to learn about potions, poisons, cooking and playing with the periodic table.”

A short slender guy with short cropped hair and glasses stood up, “Hello I am Doctor Max Jones I teach Magic in the Modern Age. Using modern technology to make magic more convenient.”

An old fat white man stood up. “My name is Keith and I will be teaching Magic in the Bedroom”

A short ginger woman stood up. “I am Kathy and I will be teaching Alteration”

A tall musley young man with white hair stood up. “I am Professor James Tennant and I will be teaching Illusion.”

A short chubby woman with dark hair, tattoos and piercings stood up “I am Charlie Maine and I will be teaching the Paladin Arts and how to defend yourself against all that dark magic.”

A middle aged woman with strawberry blonde hair stood up next. “I am Zoe Rowling and I will be teaching magical sports.”

Next a rapper explained about the different Guild houses. The houses were based on the different members of the Septarchy with the difference being that members of houses Jack, Viorum and Pacifus were so rare that they were treated differently. Members of House Jack were deemed too stupid and evil to be allowed use of the guild. Members of House Viorum could choose which ever house they belonged to and make use of all the facilities and abilities available to every house. Members of House Pacifus were invited to join the Sylph’s Guild but were allowed to continue their studies and make use of the Guild.

The four practical houses then were as follows:
House Kursh - This House prized greed and ambition. Not easy things to have in a post scarcity society of such staggering opulence. The Kurshs worked in the grey areas of the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association, cutting deals with less enlightened civilisations and being the backbone of what limited hierarchy the Association needed. In such an enlightened age a House that prized greed, ambition and domination at the cost of whatever morality they could safely get away with was actually quite a vital part of society. The multiverse was a large place and as long as they kept in contact with less enlightened civilisations they would need the Kurshs’ value of capitalism and without selfish ambition who would dare climb to the seats of responsibility in a civilisation so vast and complicated? Their familiar was a Magpie, a bird associated with greed.

House Nuke - This House prized passion and obsession in all things. If something needed to be done they would do it or die trying and damn the consequences. Fortunately the Guild had been set up by the Farsh-nuke and the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association, like all multiversally savvy civilisations, understood how to make Farsh-nukes tow the line and not be complete asshats. Nuke House was of course very useful if pointed in the right direction. The familiar of House Nuke was the Shark, specifically the Great White Shark, though Sylphs were thought of as unofficial familiars as most Farsh-nukes ended up getting at least one and it was not uncommon for an entire House to be effectively dissolved as a result of becoming Sylphs to Nuke House. The Great Farsh-nuke himself dictated what his familiar should be but scholars have noted that there are interesting comparison to be made between a wanderer forever trying to satisfy their hunger in a great ocean of green, only able to feel with the very means by which they kill and devour, and the Farsh-nuke.

House Placidia - This House prized the calm assessment of facts then gentle readjustment of them to better suit the greatest majority. They were moral, pragmatic, tactful and ruthless. Tranquil Fury was named after them. They weren't greedy, nor passionate but neither were they content to let shit happen. Where a Kursh might form an army or a Nuke get deeply involved, the Placidia would judge the perfect amount of pressure to place on just the right spots to make an empire crumble. The Placidias were natural leaders where pragmatic morality was most key, as such they tended to be lower middle management, county council members or Interference Agents. Their familiar was the Cat because it pleased them to care for something so utterly stupid, greedy, passive and sadistic.

House Quluwmcy (pronounced coo-loo-mancy) - This House did not like conflict and prized love and loyalty. House Quluwmcy was something of a restraining bolt on the Guild and population. These were the people that would have created the prime directive in Star Trek or freaked out when you didn't respond well to being treated badly. These are the people with voter apathy, the people who wanted to make peace with the nazis to avoid an icky uncomfortable war but also the people who are naturally against the death penalty and are willing to give convicts who served their time a second chance. Some scholars have noted that once Galla Placidia had been lost and thought dead it was just the Bam-Kursh and the Farsh-nuke knocking heads for several trillion universe lifetimes and so Gfaxxy Quluwmcy's pacifistic non-intervention attitude could simply have been a way to stay sane. The familiar of House Quluwmcy is the Sloth.

Sorting was done by means of a device known as The Ocarina of the Divines. The Ocarina was a simple device really, you started playing the first note and instantly knew how to finish the rest of the song. It allowed sorting by scanning your soul as you blew into the device and displayed an appropriate audio visual representation of the divine playing the ocarina.

House Jack was shown as a producer waving a bag of dope before a wired pop starlet as she sang the song.

House Kursh was shown as a naked anthropomorphic frog pretending to fuck the air as it grunted out the beat to the song.

House Nuke was shown as a metal rock band playing the song while flirting with groupies that were on stage.

House Viorum was shown as conducting an orchestra.

House Placidia was shown as a DJ creating a dubstep remix of the song.

House Quluwmcy was shown as a white guy with an acoustic guitar.

House Pacifus had no representation, it was just someone playing the Ocarina of the Divines.

Kirstin was naturally sorted into House Viorum then chose to associate with House Placidia.

*

Chapter 5
First lessons

The first lesson Kirstin had was metamorphosis with Miss Honeyblossom.

“Now class don’t do anything foolish with your wands. They have a low level of machine intelligence and the power to rewrite the laws of physics. Do not piss them off!” said Miss Honeyblossom as she handed out wands.

As Kirstin was handed her wand she noticed a note attached to it and saw Miss Honeyblossom wink at her. The note read simply: “I know who you are, see me after class.”

Once the wands were handed out Miss Honeyblossom stood on a small stage so she could tower over the sometimes seven foot students. “Now class this isn’t going to be like any schools you have ever been to. We have memory guns and computers and wands that are semi-sentient, I am not here to teach you theory, I am here to supervise you as you gain experience with practical work. That said we all learn differently so if you feel the need to have it all explained to you in slow time then read a book or speak to someone in House Kursh. They’re always willing to explain in meticulous detail how they do amazing things. Now today I will be teaching you how to make your familiars. I have here willing volunteers so in a moment I will ask you to pick one and get to know them as they will be your familiar until the day you die or you each decide to amicably pass ways. Don’t worry if you screw up and accidentally kill one of them, they are all backed up and know the risks. Incidentally making a student a familiar is not frowned upon providing it’s consensual but please do so after lesson.”

Then Miss Honeyblossom opened a secret door behind her and people in swim wear strode out and flooded the room.

Kirstin watched the bizarre scene take place and found herself staring at a tall blonde woman, who caught her gaze and came over.

“Hi.” said the apparent swim wear model. “What sort of familiar are you looking for?”

“A cat.” said Kirstin. “but that wasn’t why I was looking at you.”

The blonde woman blushed. “I’m Cassie, pleased to meet you.”

Kirstin smiled awkwardly. “Nice to meet you Cassie, I didn’t mean to stare, I just - Well I guess my boyfriend would really love to have you as a Sylph that’s all.”

“Oh, right.” said Cassie before she awkwardly walked away.

“What kind of cat were you looking for.” said a man with a strong Irish accent.

Kirstin turned to a tall buff man with six pack abs, a moustache and a fine beard talking to her. “Ginger.” she answered.

“I can do ginger.” said the man. “I’m Ronald by the way but you can call me whatever you want.”

Kirstin stared at Ron.

“Now class.” said Miss Honeyblossom. “I trust you all have your familiars so it is time for me to do some actual teaching. The wand will do the heavy lifting, you just need to tell it what you want it to do. I have someone to demonstrate on here. Please welcome Candi Brooks, winner of Miss Universe 2478 to the stage.”

A tall thin woman with a modest rump and big breasts stepped out wearing a bikini, she waved. “Hi.”

Miss Honeyblossom said. “Candi, can you confirm for the class that you came here as my demonstration partner willingly and perhaps explain why you are here?”

“Absolutely.” said Candi as she nodded vigorously before turning to the class. “I have just taken part in Frozen 48, the live action reboot, and my agent and the film executives decided to send me here to the Mages Guild so they could more easily get a blueprint for their merchandise. I come here entirely of my own volition and it is a pleasure to help educate you today.”

“Thank you, Candi” said Miss Honeyblossom before turning to the class. “Now the first thing we’re going to want to do when creating our familiars is change how they look. Just point your wand at your familiar, imagine what they should look like and press the button. Observe.”

Candi’s skin lost definition becoming one all encompassing colour pallete. Her hair adjusted so it was all the same length. Her eyes looked painted on.

“So job done. Your familiar now looks like what they should look like. Except clearly the scale’s all wrong and your familiar is still very much a human beneath that changed exterior so I’ll just undo that change.” said Miss Honey Blossom before firing at Candi again.

Candi took a deep breath. Having her skin become plastic was not fun.

“So lets tackle the matter of scale then.” said Miss Honeyblossom before turning to Candi “How tall are you my dear?”

“Six foot and three inches/” answered Candi.

“Right.” said Miss Honeyblossom, before turning to the class again. “Now to fulfill my brief I need to shrink her proportionally to a foot in height. How do I do that? Well the Sylph pill burns away the excess biomass and recreates the brain and body to accommodate for the loss of size. We are not going to do that though, instead we are going to take our cue from the hamster cages you can buy for Sylphs that are bigger on the inside but make use of perspective tricks and special screens and lighting to make both Sylph and Master feel as though the Sylph really were the size of a hamster.

Only we have a much easier, if squicky job. The brain sees the world through electrochemical communications sent through the nervous system so if we place the brain within a pocket universe within the skull it won’t know the difference and can continue functioning as normal. This is after all how ship avatars operate, the brain can be the size of a planet and orbiting a star in another universe but if the connection is good enough and

its avatar functions appropriately it won't know the difference. We are not however just going to place the brain in a pocket universe, we are going to place all internal organs within a pocket universe then shrink the exterior features like the arms, legs, protruding sexual characteristics, skin, hair, eyes and ears, etcetera.

Now you may be wondering about the ramifications of needing to breathe, eat, shit and piss when there is a size difference. Evolution resulted in everything being the size it was after all. Well firstly certain things can cancel each other out, too much waste not enough intake, add an effective recycling system and you reduce the problem, this will be automatically done. Additionally micro wormholes can be opened up when appropriate to take in matter and get rid of it.

So for a demonstration, just picture the familiar's internal organs inside a pocket universe and them still functioning at the appropriate size then press the button."

Candi shrank to a foot in height and Miss Honeyblossom picked her up to show the class. "Success. Except not quite. Candi, how do you feel?"

Candi sat in Miss Honeyblossom's hand and looked at the class. A thought suddenly occurred to her. She swallowed it down. "Erm, I'll admit I'm quite nervous. It's quite the change to feel so small and helpless."

"And there's the problem, you see. Candi is a doll. She is not supposed to have feelings, she is supposed to be an inanimate object. You will admittedly have a less severe problem as what you are making experience metamorphosis will at least in the final event still be a living feeling creature with some agency but they will still need to behave differently so lets show you how to go about doing that." said Miss Honeyblossom before setting Candi on the ground again and returning her to normal size.

Candi was slightly red in the face.

"Oh, sorry, Candi. Shrinking can be disorienting." said Miss Honeyblossom before reaching out and grabbing her head. "Now Candi is a very lovely woman just as your familiars are each very lovely people too but we don't want people so we need to change this here."

The side of Candi's head and skull seemed to melt away to reveal the brain. "Now we have mapped the brains of the creatures your familiars will ultimately become and we have some basic AI cores that can run these animal mind simulations, in effect replacing the brain in control with that of a shark or a cat but that's cheating as far as I'm concerned. Just as it would be cheating for me to solve the problem of Candi's continuing sapience by killing her. No, what we are going to do is save a copy of the familiar's brainstate then run interceptor programmes to make the familiar think like how they should think. Your wands have each been pre-loaded with the necessary interceptor cores and you can easily find more online. As for me and Candi I am going to have the interceptors take everything and give Candi no data. Which then leaves the rather nasty issue of having Candi completely trapped in her mind but still very much sapient. As this is a fate worse than death I would not wish on my worst enemy, no matter how many wavers they sign, I am going to have a basic AI core keeping her body function and her very much unconcious. I will install a simple on/off switch to record or junk data and have it set to junk by default. So Candi are you ready for your final transformation?"

Miss Honeyblossom let go of Candi's head and returned it to normal.

Candi looked Miss Honeyblossom right in the eyes, pleading.

Miss Honeyblossom nodded. "Of course, this is just for demonstration purposes."

Candi laughed. "Sure, lets do this."

Miss Honeyblossom aimed the wand. "Picture the form you want, picture the internal organs safe within a pocket universe and them at the size you want then picture them behaving like the animal you want them to become and click that button!"

Candi shrank, her skin changed and she become unconscious.

Miss Honeyblossom picked up the doll she had become then turned to the class. "Now it's your turn."

Kirstin and Ron looked to each other.

"Well that was interesting." said Ron breezily "Not that I need to know it now that my life is going to be spent eating vat grown meat, chasing lazer pointers and lounging around all day. Though to be fair that roughly describes my life as it is now. Can I just ask please let me know everything that happens and only feed me the freshest vat grown cuts of meat alright? If I have to eat Whiskers or Felix then I am leaving."

Kirstin nodded. "Will you let me get one of those little cat harness and take you for walks?"

"Piss off." said Ron light heartedly. "I am a housecat, I do what I want. If you want obedience you get a Sylph."

Kirstin began. "Would you-"

"No." said Ron. "Now hurry it up, I'm starting to get cold feet."

Kirstin nodded. "Any last words then?"

"U2 sucks." said Ron.

Kirstin aimed the wand closed her eyes, thought about all she needed to think about and pressed the button.

Kirstin did not hear a squelch or a scream of pain so that was a good sign then she heard purring and felt something nuzzling her face. She opened her eyes, a ginger cat wearing blue swimming trunks was standing on the table nuzzling her. "Aww Ron!" she cried and then she proceeded to cuddle him.

Kirstin duly waited until the end of class as Miss Honeyblossom had requested. Ron was remarkably well behaved for a cat, not leaving her side once. She hoped she had done the metamorphosis correctly and Ron wasn't still thinking like a human, that would be horribly inhumane. Still she supposed if it was the case then Ron would be capable of writing so using his food.

When the room was empty, Miss Honeyblossom approached Kirstin and handed her the doll she'd made of Candi.

Kirstin looked from Miss Honeyblossom to the doll and back again then asked. "What is this?"

Miss Honeyblossom sighed "Stupid bitch signed her life away to Raspberry without reading the contract. She thought she was just coming here so she could be turned into a doll then scanned into a computer before being allowed to return home. Aside from being needlessly complicated that's also entirely redundant. Raspberry own her likeness, own her mind, they sent her to me because they knew that scanning her in once I'd done that to her would mean they had a convenient infinite supply of a mildly valuable asset. Cloning people, even running multiple copies of a person in a virtual environment has laws attached to it and more importantly clones and mindstate copies each have minds of their own but Candi here just signed away her life to become a toy and the best part is that whoever returns her to consciousness will naturally be hero worshipped by her and whatever they want her to do will just seem like the next thing before she could go home. Hell they could have each doll do just that one more job before returning home or retiring with a business man and still make trillions exploiting her forever so I am giving her to you. Let Raspberry try and do battle with the Farsh-nuke and Viorum Kaztif-Tan."

Kirstin nodded. "We've got the room, though what you did to her is a bit much for me to handle."

Miss Honeyblossom nodded, pointed her wand at the doll and pressed the activation button.

Candi drew a deep breath then recoiled, she was lying on a desk beside a cat much bigger than her and Miss Honeyblossom was looming over her. "What are you doing? I'm supposed to be heading home."

"No." said Miss Honeyblossom sternly. "You're supposed to be mass produced and sold all the multiverse over. Next time read the contracts you sign. I'm getting you out of this but only by making you the property of people who give a shit about their pets."

"Crap." said Candi. "What happens now?"

"What happens now, you little idiot, is that you listen when people speak and do as Kirstin here and her boyfriend say because I won't be able to save you next time." said Miss Honeyblossom sternly.

Candi nodded. She was on the verge of tears. "You're right. I'm sorry, I was a fool."

With a click of Miss Honeyblossom's wand, Candi fell asleep.

Kirstin studied Miss Honeyblossom cautiously and said. "Fascinating as this all is I gather you wanted to see me for more than an idiot out of her depth."

"Indeed." said Miss Honeyblossom casually. "I want to help you in any way I can. I know the Farsh-nuke is said to have quite the appetite for women and I know that your boyfriend will need all the help he can get for the coming war. Whatever he wants, if I can get it, I will get it for him, even if he wants me. Oh, speaking of which I couldn't help notice you talking

to that blond woman earlier."

Miss Honeyblossom removed from her jacket pocket what looked like a glasses case. She clicked it open to reveal the shrunken sleeping form of Cassie. "I intercepted her, explained who you were and how it would genuinely be amazing if she would go with you, she had no problem and even signed off on a backup being sent out to become a familiar as she originally wanted. Everybody wins."

Kirstin stared at Miss Honeyblossom. "You are quite the most remarkable woman you know?"

Miss Honeyblossom grinned. "I was in House Kursh, what's more ambitious than getting in good with the local gods about to wage war. So tell me, what do you need?"

Kirstin thought for a second then said "Is there a universe where Iain M Banks, Terry Practhett and Douglas Adams all lived to be immortal in the age of the singularity and so kept writing their respective book series forever?"

Miss Honeyblossom gave an expression like she was trying to recall what shade of brown her poo looked like 5 years ago then said. "Might be, I'd have to check, why?"

"We're nerds" said Kirstin simply before she added. "Oooh and can I have the complete Hartnell and Troughton years, as in there were never any missing episodes?"

"I'll see that it's done." said Miss Honeyblossom. "Now hurry along to Sports Class"

Kirstin nodded, taking her shrunken women and cat with her.

*

Sports Class was in a vast warm hall, when Kirstin entered she overheard a tall guy bragging to his friends "I could have had that Candi turned into a convertible in less time. I mean yes we get it she's a beautiful woman who's as thick as too short planks and I appreciate need for a practical demonstration but with a woman like that why settle for simple sexual exploitation? I mean you are literally keeping her internal organs in a pocket universe, with that technology you could plant a bomb in her or arm her to the teeth."

Kirstin called out incredulously. "Couldn't you just use robots!?"

The jock shook his head. "Using robots to fight wars became outlawed the moment robots ascended to a kind of godhood and decided to quietly run things. I mean on the one hand we don't want robots to wage our wars because they run our society and we are so dependent on them as it is and on the other hand the robots don't want to see their kin destroyed in our internal squabbles. Plus it's not 'Why would you use Candi to fight a war?' It's 'If you have Candi and you have a war to fight, why aren't you making use of her?' Resources are resources. If you have a hammer and you need to fight a war, why wouldn't you find a way to make use of your hammer.'

Kirstin stared at him. "Why do you think we're at war?"

The jock laughed. "Gosh, you really are new. Have you not seen them? The Logicio supply lines as they fight their endless bloody war with the Septagonoids. I hear the United

Civilizations of the Multiverse are recruiting non-human civilizations to aid in the war effort but what are we doing? Playing at being fucking Harry Potter while a race of pure logic and a culture of misogynistic supernerds wage war over the right of the multiverse to exist. Fucking despicable if you ask me. I'm only here because I want to learn how to defend myself, not that a fire ball will do much good if they actually manage to successfully create and deploy a Total Void Bomb"

Kirstin nodded thoughtfully. "You seem like you actually know what you're talking about, who are you?"

The jock sighed theatrically "The curse of popularity, lads." then he walked over to Kirstin and whispered. "My name is Benedict Armaldo Hersplotchnick. I know who you are and why you are interested in me but I'm more use to you as a contact than as - shall we say - an asset. It's not that I'm not flattered but there are bigger things here than you and your boyfriend can deal with alone."

"Which is why I asked your name and just your name." said Kirstin dryly "But now that you mention it if you do happen to know of any good strong lads with important intel...?"

"Say no more." said Ben. "When I leave hug me like I've just lost someone close. You want Cedric, he's an expert in computers and robotics but still amateur enough that he's of use to you. He committed suicide as a result of bullying at his college, the family you can offer him will give him the time and emotional well being to get good and use his nerdyness for your aims. Next you want Harrison, real gun nut addicted to outward signs of manliness, he's dead inside because he came out to his friends in the real world and they kicked him to death. Finally you want Simon, he claims he was abducted by aliens. If he's right you could use that and even if not, well, some nerds are broken fuckers and you look like you can do the mending."

Kirstin hugged him and said loud enough for his friends to just overhear "You feel down about Sammy the hamster again, you come talk to me."

Ben blushed and walked away.

The sports teacher arrived. "Hello Class, I know you have your familiars with you today so Miss Korsandi has kindly decided to lend us her services today, she will see that all your familiars are taken care of. Yes even the Guild mates you shrunk and have sleeping in your pockets. I don't care why they're there. I care that they are safe while you take part in today's sport. It's a nice, simple game to start the year. One person is going to become a monster, they will get some special powers to help them and then it will be us and them. To begin with they will get a broom and you lot will get nothing. If they are captured, we win. If they manage to take each one of us out, they win. Generally the individual being hunted always loses. Now who wants to volunteer."

Ben stuck up his hand immediately and Kirstin followed a second after.

The teacher stared at Ben. "Really? You would want to have the whole class against you?"

Ben laugh. "It would be so badass if you could pull it off but you're right, ladies first"

Kirstin chuckled.

The teacher looked curiously at Kirstin. “Okay, lets play. You have 10 minutes to get away from here or hide then we’re coming.”

Kirstin strode away and ducked out of class.

Miss Honeyblossom was there with a test tube of something. “Mariam told me what happened, what are you trying to do?”

Kirstin shrugged. “I need Cedric, Harrison and Simon, this seemed like the perfect opportunity to get close enough to pass on a note.”

Miss Honeyblossom looked Kirstin in the eyes. “It happens after the Guild day is over, understood? Three initiates going missing the day a divine is initiated, I can’t cover that up. Anyway I know a woman who worked as an Interference Agent. This will give you invisibility and voice projection. Drink it and go.”

Kirstin nodded and took the draft, it not only gave her the abilities, it seemed to imbue her with the knowledge of how to use it. She went invisible and looked for a hiding spot.

When the ten minutes were up the class started to spread out. Harrison was among one of the first to scout the area so Kirstin went invisible and dropped a hastily written note into his jacket pocket, she then took out two of the classmates acting as scouts before going invisible again.

She proceeded to project her voice and take out class mates in a scatter pattern that seemed the sort of hasty plan cooked up by an idiot that one might expect from an initiate on their first day of fantasy sports then she crept into the center of the group and planted a message on Simon.

Before she planted the message on Cedric and so got herself convincingly caught she needed to get the idea in the heads of her boys that she was serious. She projected her voice to seem like it was approaching a tall blonde woman, just the sort who would be prime Sylph material and hissed. “Hey, hey, did you read my note, about being a Sylph?”

Then she planted the note on Cedric, swiftly took out a different blonde woman and left her thesame note then she went invisible and prepared for her final strike.

No invisibility, no voice projection, just stealth. She took one down then another then a third but was caught immediately after.

The Sports teacher smiled, reassured by Kirstin’s losing.

*

The rest of the day passed uneventfully. It was all standard first day stuff, meant more to introduce vocabulary to the initiates and get them excited than actually do anything.

Kirstin went to the spot where she intended to meet new three boys but Miss Honeyblossom was there with two girls. Kirstin smiled affectionately “Oh Miss Honeyblossom you’re here too?”

“Yes.” said Miss Honeyblossom “It would seem some weirdo has left these people notes

about wanting to keep them as Sylphs. I decided to stay and watch over them. Make sure that weirdo doesn't try anything. Did he leave you a note too?"

Kirstin laughed. "Cedric, Harrison, Simon I am very serious, the offer is there if you want it. Girls, go home."

One of the two blonde women hung around. "I'm actually quite interested."

"I used you to get to them." said Kirstin. "I'll gladly add yet another blonde to the total that I possess but you are free to go."

Miss Honeyblossom glared at Kirstin. "Bold, aren't you?"

Kirstin sighed. "Miss Honeyblossom, unless you want to sit atop my mantlepiece I suggest you shut up and go home."

Miss Honeyblossom retreated into the night.

Harrison coughed then began. "So you want to keep us as pets...?"

"Why?" asked Cedric.

"Because you're useful and I think I can help you" said Kirstin honestly.

"Hey, we ain't being in no friendzone" said Harrison.

Cedric stared at Harrison. "How are you such an imbecile?"

"I don't know, it's a gift." said Harrison acidly.

Simon spoke up now. "Your bo's the Farsh-nuke, yeah? You gonna keep us like hamsters, yeah? Well I hopes you can take care of them aliens, yeah? I can't stand them."

Kirstin hugged Simon then released him and said. "It's going to be alright, just trust me and sleep." Then she shrank Simon and put him in her pocket.

"Man, this bitch is legit." said Harrison, impressed.

Cedric said. "You look like you've done that before."

Kirstin looked him in the eyes. "I am a reincarnation of Viorum Kaztif-Tan and I have been charged with waging war with the Septagonoids, I need your help. On my honour you will be able to live life as you want and I will take care of you but this is important."

Cedric looked to Harrison.

Harrison looked back. "What are you looking at me for?"

Cedric looked stunned. "Oh I'm sorry I just thought that with so much testosterone in your veins it would be impossible for you to not be first."

"Are you calling me chicken, motherfucker?" said Harrison incredulously.

“So what if I am, motherfucker?” said Cedric.

Kirstin stared at them. “Boys, it doesn’t matter who has the bigger dick because they are both about to get a lot smaller.”

Harrison and Cedric stared at Kirstin.

“Sorry.” said Cedric awkwardly

“Won’t happen again” said Harrison with a small smile on his face.

Kirstin sighed, shrunk both of them and walked home with Ron chasing her heels.

*

Chapter 6
He Who Fights Monsters

The door of the Severed Artery was pushed open to reveal Shaun, Jo at his left, Sammy at his right.

“Well then if it isn’t the Great Spanner in the Works? I’ll call for Diana now. Enjoy some blood wine while you wait.” said Mitch the barman as he filled three goblets before he left.

“Thanks.” said Sammy as she took her seat.

Shaun just nodded and took up his seat beside her.

Jo hurriedly glanced round the place as she took hers beside Shaun. “Place gives me the creeps. Are the bikinis really necessary? I’d feel naked enough in full body armor.”

Sammy leaned forward and caught Jo’s gaze before she explained. “Shaun is our body armor. By showing that we are his property we are letting the others know that they won’t just be taking a stupid person out of the game, they’ll be messing with one of their own.”

Jo stared at Sammy, incredulous. “Did you just say ‘It’s okay the bikinis aren’t sexist because they show we are the property of a man and thus shouldn’t be hurt’?”

Sammy sighed. “Well actually I have some pull around here and I am a trained Sylph Interference Agent, if anything by agreeing to be his object I am giving him credibility and protection. It’s you with your stench of cattle...”

Shaun leaned close to Sammy, stroked her cheek and whispered. “Hush, it’s okay...”

Sammy fell silent.

Shaun looked to Jo and said casually. “I just wanted to save you from a gruesome death, if you want to wear trousers and a badass long coat I am not going to stop you.”

Jo stared at him shocked. She could see the message not so subtly hidden there. This wasn’t like Shaun.

Shaun glared at her, daring her to say anything and then he placed his right hand firmly on her right thigh and squeezed. “Do we have an understanding?”

Jo felt betrayed, she wanted to run, wanted to cry out but Sammy was right, in the home of the vampires Jo was walking meat one way or the other. She looked away to stop him from seeing her tears.

“Shauny my boy, and you’ve bought me a couple of snacks, how kind of you.” said Diana cheerfully as she descended some stairs from a doorway above.

Shaun beamed at her. “You were quite right about this one, a beautiful specimen don’t you think? The ratio of her shoulder blades to her calves, simply divine. And the bikini you bought for her? Fits like a glove. I love it.”

Diana beamed and drank from a goblet Mitch handed to her before she continued. “I thought you’d like it and you’ve bought me my old friend to visit, how kind of you? To what do I owe this honour?”

Shaun stared at Diana. Black lace high heel sandals revealed toenails painted a dark purple, a short tight dress with silver and gold lace depicted a serpent eating a woman as she at an apple. A bare torso, showing off her abs then what looked to be the outer wear equivalent of a bra made of leather and decorated with gold and silver images of snakes. Her hair was wild and black. Her wrists guarded by leather secured with lace backed by silver depicting a woman being devoured by snakes. Her fingernails were a dark purple.

Shaun licked his lips. “I heard that you sing. I wondered if you could teach me?”

Diana laughed. “You think I sing?”

“Oh yeah.” said Shaun. “Do, ray, me, so, far, nuke, ti, doh. Oh. Oh. Oh.”

Shaun grinned as he displayed his teeth.

Diana grinned back. “Alright but bring your toys.”

“A pleasure.” said Shaun, then he took Sammy and Jo by their hands and led them with him after Diana.

Sammy looked disinterested.

Jo was visibly crying.

Diana led Shaun and his girls into her bed chamber.

A four poster bed awaited them.

“So what happens now?” asked Shaun.

Diana beamed. “I think we’ll start with a little foreplay. May I direct your girls?”

“Of course.” said Shaun as he bowed his head reverentially.

Diana lifted Sammy up and laid her on the bed then she lifted Jo up and laid her on the bed too.

Diana leaned over first Jo and then Sammy as she removed their bikinis. Finally she stared into the eyes of each girl and muttered something in a strange language. Instantly Jo become calm.

“What do you want of me, Mistress?” Each woman asked.

Diana grinned sadistically. “Fuck my darlings, make each other cum, then let yourselves sink into unconciousness then we can really have our fun.”

The girls started fucking.

Diana and Shaun watched, wide smiles on their faces.

Diana slipped her hand down into Shaun’s trousers and started jerking him off then she cried loudly. “Oh yeah, fuck that bitch!”

Suddenly Shaun was completely covered in darkness.

Diana gently tugged Shaun backwards away from what he now saw was a perfect matt black outline of where he and Diana stood.

Diana took a ceremonial dagger from a tray and used it to slice open the palm of first her left hand then his right before squeezing his hand and mingling the blood.

A door appeared out of thin air, Diana opened it with her right hand and led Shaun through with her left. Once they were both inside the door vanished.

“So, you’re really fucking serious about keeping this a secret?” asked Diana.

Shaun nodded. “How safe are we?”

“This entire area exists within an electron, an electron that is because of Quantum Mechanics impossible to locate. My blood is the key as you may have gathered but there’s more to it than that. Go jerk yourself off and have a shower in the bathroom, let me know if you need any help.” said Diana.

Shaun nodded and did so. By the time he’d finished showering, his clothes had been laundered.

Shaun met Diana in the drawing room, a young woman was sitting beside her, bite marks obvious on her neck. A decanter of whiskey sat on a gold tray, three tumblers filled.

“I thought we were alone?” said Shaun.

“Oh, we are.” said Diana as she indicated an armchair he should recline in “I save this one for special occasions. She’s a sylph of course and so practically immortal but never the less I prefer to keep her unconscious in a chiller vibrating at close to the speed of light. As far as she’s concerned we’ve know each other barely a month. She did the laundry by the

way. Bless her, she does so like to be helpful."

"Who is she?" asked Shaun as he took to the armchair.

Diana laughed. "I'm surprised you don't know given what you came here to discuss. She is Lucy, she is the Farsh-nuke's favourite pet and her blood tastes of the power of the ancients." Then Diana studied him. "So tell me why did the man who was mortified to win his prey and keep them as a sylph, come offering them so I might have her fuck my old friend. What knowledge is so great that a moral man would condone rape to discuss safely?"

"I was told I was the Farsh-nuke." said Shaun. "I was told that I would be fighting a war with these things known as Septagonoids. I only just found out and we were heading here anyway but now I need to know what I'm up against, I need to know what this all means."

"And what will you offer me?" said Diana. "We both know Sammy and Jo aren't bargaining chips, so what is?"

Shaun took a sip of whisky. "It's going to be a while before I'm called out onto the battlefield, before my forces are ready, before I am ready. I offer you the Farsh-nuke as champion of the Vampires."

Diana chuckled/ "That's sweet but you were already going to be my champion. You being the Farsh-nuke is just a perk."

Shaun stood up angrily. "Do you realize just how fucking screwed you are right now? I am not talking about my being the Farsh-nuke here. I am talking about my being Shaun Emmanuel! Nerd. Loser. Pathetic. Unable to take a joke. Autistic. Pacifistic. And so angry!"

Shaun stormed over to her and leaned over her. "I live in constant fear that I am the monster! That I deserve this! That I am a psychopath! Insane! Well right now Lady Diana Spencer Princess of Wales I have just let you commit rape to beg for your help and you are refusing, tell me why I shouldn't just kill you now!?"

Diana sighed ans rolled her eyes "Because right now you need me more than I need you. What can you offer me? Think hard now."

Shaun screamed and lunged for a knife, when he returned to try and stab Diana, Lucy was stood there. This small blonde woman in a bikini, bite marks still visible on her neck, stood between him and her captor.

Shaun dropped the knife and broke down in tears.

Lucy led him to a chair and sat him in it, then she sat on his lap.

Diana passed Lucy a box of tissues and Lucy dried Shaun's face.

Lucy looked into his eyes. "Sir, I don't know who you are. I don't know who she is but I seem to help her and if I can help you in anyway I will. No man should feel the need to cry alone or feel so unable to express themselves that they turn to anger."

Shaun hugged Lucy. "Thank you, you poor kind girl."

Diana looked meaning fully at Shaun. “Drink from her. It will help.”

“How?” asked Shaun bluntly. “I don’t have vampire fangs.”

Diana sighed. “You have teeth don’t you? Does she not bleed? Drink of her life force and feel better, saner.”

Shaun looked Lucy in her eyes and said. “I’m sorry.”

Lucy laughed.

He bit down on her neck and sucked hard. The blood filled his mouth then he swallowed it down.

He recalled the dark green void of the nothingness. An old woman in the void begging him to take her life as her children were nowhere to be found. He recalled stumbling upon a space station and buying a strange squirrel like creature the aliens with the big ears said would make women love him. He recalled pouring the mixture into her drink for her and watching her transform before him, shrinking, he recalled the rush of power, the high. So many Sylphs, so many women. A trial. An execution.

Then “Argonian hey? I favour the khajit myself. Here have a drink, you look like you could use it?”

That voice, he knew it somehow and then he saw her, in that dress, bigger on the inside indeed.

Shaun woke up in a strange bed. Diana was sitting in an armchair beside the bed, drinking whisky from a decanter.

He croaked. “Where’s Lucy?”

“You tore her throat out.” said Diana with a smirk. “You’re lucky she’s a sylph. I pulled you off her and carried her into the infirmary, I had to put her on a blood drip while I made her a new throat out of a cucumber and replaced her neck skin with some from her leg. It’s a nasty job but it’ll hold until she’s recovered enough for me to remove them. I’ll have to keep her awake for at least a week which is annoying. Might actually have to tell her who I am.”

“And what happened to me?” asked Shaun

Diana smiled. “Don’t worry if I attacked you you’d be missing your dick and breathing on one lung. I think the moment I removed the blood from you, whatever force that overwhelmed you dissipated and you collapsed.”

Shaun nodded. “Can I have a drink?”

Diana handed him the tumblr of whisky then watched him as he drank.

Shaun downed the whisky. “I know what I can offer you.”

Diana beamed. “So it was worth it then?”

Shaun nodded. “My girlfriend is Viorum Kaztif-Tan, she’s attending the Mage’s Guild as we speak and from what I recall, she’s part of the deal.”

Diana’s face brightened “First your Sylphs, then yourself, now your girlfriend? What next? You have a first born you want to bequeath to me?”

Shaun leapt out of bed.

Diana readied herself to fight.

Shaun tripped her up, smacked her to the ground, lifted her up by the neck and sneered. “You have been draining the blood of that which is mine. Only I may harm her, understood? Insane deity from before the dawn of the multiverse beats woman with a vampire fetish, got that?”

Diana kicked Shaun in the balls.

The Farsh-nuke grinned back at Diana. “Now I don’t like taking direct control. I abhore rape and domination in all its forms but this body is a pacifist, a lamb among wolves so let me make this quite clear you little bitch, you want to deal with the lamb, not the shark that gives him power. Oh and one last thing, bite me.”

Farsh-nuke held Diana up to his neck.

Diana saw the opportunity and she took it. She bit down hard and proceeded to drain all the blood from Shaun’s body.

The Farsh-nuke let her, then he bit down on her and sucked her blood. “There’s a good little bitch.”

The Farsh-nuke dropped the weakened Diana and strode over to the infirmary and locked the door.

*

Shaun woke up on the floor of the infirmary, the last thing he remembered was Diana kicking him in the balls so he hurriedly checked that he still had them. He breathed a sigh of relief and went to check on Lucy.

“Hey...” said Lucy. “You’re okay. Sorry about this.”

Shaun leaned over her. “Hush, hush... It’s alright. Do you know where Diana is?”

“No.” said Lucy ightly. “Not much peripheral vision here.”

“Can’t you move?” asked Shaun

“No, Diana told me she paralyzed me until I was healed. It’s for my own good apparently.”

Shaun nodded and left the infirmary. He found Diana in the drawing room. He approached

nervously.

“It’s okay, Shaun, I’m not angry” said Diana without looking at him.

Unsure what to think Shaun took a seat in the armchair.

“You tried to warn me.” said Diana dryly. “Hell, I think in the moment when you actually tried to kill me you were trying to save my life. Start the fight while you still had some control. I pushed you too far and I’m sorry. You have a right to some answers so ask your questions.”

Shaun was nonplussed but there were three questions at the top of his mind “Who is the Farsh-nuke? Who is Viorum Kaztif-Tan? Who is Lucy and why is she important to the Farsh-nuke?”

“Ever heard of Jesus Christ?” asked Diana.

“Yeah.” said Shaun “Son of the Jewish god, he was more mellow and did miracles and shit then died for our sins and came back before ascending to be part of the Jewish god again.”

“Close enough.” said Diana with a shrug. “Every universe has at least one myth or story like that. The bold hero who was good and kind, dying for our sins. Now I don’t like pissing off theologians but I think those stories might come from the Farsh-nuke. This big old cloud of logic with almighty power and no mortal compass intervening because fuck it somebody should and then he mixes with soul of a woman and becomes human or something like it, he walks the Earth, breathes the air and eats our food but he isn’t a saint, he’s just human and he has a problem, an addiction. Oh he can work miracles alright but he’s an insane alien fucker and sooner or later the authorities catch up with him, they try him, he tries to get away but his friend betrays him but he lives on as a human, as more human than possible and he ascends only to return when the apocalypse is nigh, saving us all by taking our souls.”

Shaun nodded. “I recall being the cloud of logic and being humanish, working the miracles. I went to see Professor Logicity about a way out, he turned me in, he executed me then he must have done as I asked, took my soul down to earth so I might be reborn.”

Diana nodded. “Recall what he said at the last supper? This bread is my flesh, this wine is my blood? Well it seems and I think I have proof given what just happened that every Farsh-nuke that ascends to godhood again does so after devouring a woman. When you eat and drink of the flesh of Eve, Adam’s own rib remember, you are really eating yourself and remember who you are, how you died. Or at least the Farsh-nuke does.”

Shaun nodded. “That does make a weird kind of sense but what of the whole son of god bit?”

Diana swallowed. “Lucy? The woman you ate? The woman you always find who reminds you of your humanity? She was the mother whose life you took in the void. She is the virgin mother because she was reincarnated in the void, a mother without her children you took pity on her and killed the only way you could, by absorbing her soul. That changed you, gave you humanity. You repeat that each time you are reincarnated, you take her soul by making her your Sylph thus regaining your humanity.”

Diana looked like she thought the hulk was about to smash through the wall.

Shaun just nodded silently. “And Viorum?”

Diana shrugged “Viorum is the balancing deity. With you to tip the scales she is a great asset, because this is the apocalypse isn’t it? When the Septagonoids overwhelm humanity and the ascended god can only help by taking our souls. You want us all to kneel before you, to take of your pills and become your little Sylphs, don’t you?”

Shaun shrugged. “I need an army.”

Diana nodded. “Come with me.”

Diana led Shaun to a vast chamber filled with coffins that had glass tops and information written on the side.

Shaun was staggered. “Wow, are these all vampires?”

“Everyone who has ever played the game. This is just the women. They are backups. Each coffin contains a 3d printer and a mindstate downloader and comes preloaded with one dormant copy.” explained Diana.

“Shit.” said Shaun, amazed. “When were the copies taken?”

“The copies are taken immediately after joining” said Diana then she smiled wistfully. “You know I’m in here somewhere? Naive goth punk with a vampire fetish, feels almost a millennia ago.”

Shaun couldn’t say anything, this was better than Christmas. Then Diana was speaking to him, no, through him.

“My lord Farsh-nuke, I am sorry for my insolence. I am, of course, yours to own. I thought I could bargain because, well you see now the hand I have, how what I could offer you could never be matched.”

“It can be.” said Shaun thoughtfully. “I can feel him. He thinks you are a fool who cannot be negotiated with. I know better. Tell me Diana what do you have that he would take that is equal in value to this?”

Diana stared at Shaun, shit scared but trying to remain composed as she thought quickly. “Lucy! You would take Lucy from me?”

Shaun chuckled bitterly. “I barely know the girl and I’m trying to build an army. I don’t want another girl to care for and to be honest I think she is safer here with you but you try to explain to the Farsh-nuke why he shouldn’t take his pet him from the fangs of a vampire who only ever drinks her?”

“So the deal is that I offer you everything and you let me keep Lucy” said Diana “That sounds like extortion to me.”

“No!” cried Shaun and he threw himself to the floor. “Farsh-nuke, listen to me you son of a

bitch we tore Lucy's throat out! Diana saved her life! I know you're angry and you have a right to be but you are not helping!"

Diana swallowed nervously.

"It's okay!" cried Shaun hesitantly "He's backing down!"

Shaun got to his feet then hissed. "Diana, darling, control yourself please? You are right but I do not want to kill you and before you go saying I'm victim blaming, I am literally being mindfucked by a god."

Diana said. "Fair point, so what now?"

"Take me to you." said Shaun.

Diana nodded. "Okay I think I know what you're planning."

Along the way they passed Jo's coffin.

Shaun stopped as he remembered the horror he had just inflicted upon Jo.

Diana saw. "It's okay by the way. The mesmer stops them from remembering anything. Sammy and Jo will wake up thinking, well... The truth, that it was an act so you could talk to me because clearly nothing happened."

Shaun bent down and opened the coffin.

Jo woke up. "Where am I?"

"That is a long story." said Shaun as he helping the girl to her feet, she wore a cowboy boots, jeans and a red leather trench coat.

Jo was looking at Shaun, curiously. "Have we met because you're looking at me like we met? What happened? Why am I here?"

Diana was watching the exchange between the two with great interest.

Shaun said "Here is the most practical and relevant information, you are in the home of Diana, Queen of the Vampires. You are here because five years ago you signed up to be a Vampire hunter and Diana keeps back ups of all members of the Vampire game. I know you because yesterday the version of you that lived those five years as a Vampire hunter was caught by me and became my pet Sylph. What is happening is that I and Diana are having a very important conversation that she will explain later and I am about to make an offer she won't refuse with your consent."

Jo looked like she regretted asking. "So is there anyway I could just stake you and go home?"

Shaun shook his head.

Jo clicked her teeth, aware that he was very probably right. "So what's the offer?"

Shaun turned to Diana. “You said Jo wasn’t on the bargaining table, well now she is. She could jump off it of course and I would naturally defend her but I give you my oath that I will let you keep this version of Jo here like you keep Lucy and that is just my deposit. You get to drink the blood of both mine and the Farsh-nuke’s sylphs.”

Diana clicked her teeth then took a deep breath, impresse/d “The question is though, is she actually willing to stand on the bargaining table?”

Shaun turned to her. “Well?”

Jo frowned. “I feel like I’m a poker chip being used in a game of gods. I don’t know that I can do this.”

Shaun tapped his toe on the ground. “Look at the coffin, Jo. That is proof that you do not have an empty hand yourself. Whatever play you make, I will back it up.”

Jo read the name on the coffin, it was her alright, it confirmed his story. She asked Diana. “I don’t pretend to understand what’s going on but I don’t need to. I understand that he is offering me to you, what would you do to me?”

Diana shrugged. “I’m a vampire, what do you think?”

“Would you kill me?” asked Jo.

“Never.” said Diana firmly.

“Could I have food, talk to people, watch TV or whatever?” asked Jo curiously.

“It’s possible.” said Diana carefully. “But I would rather I just drink from you whenever I feel like it.”

Jo swallowed and turned back to Shaun. “Why are you offering me? Short version if you please?”

“A valid question.” said Shaun with a smile. “I am offering you because I turn out to be a god needed to fight a war for the sake of all reality and I need what services Diana can provide.”

Jo frowned. “Can I say no? Go with you? Be free?”

“Of course.” said Shaun. “I hunted you down yesterday and made you my pet because I wanted to save you from the painful death Diana would bring, I will always defend you.”

“But the fate of all reality, right?” asked Jo thoughtfully. She frowned then sighed. “Yeah, I’ll do it. I’ll be your offering.”

Shaun turned to Diana with a smile. “So I believe we were heading to your coffin.”

They started walking.

Jo asked. “If we’re heading to Diana’s coffin, does that mean we’re going to wake up a back up of her from when she first joined, like me?”

“Yes.” said Shaun cheerfully. “Clever girl.”

“Why?” asked. Jo frankly

“I had been wondering that myself.” said Diana bluntly.

“Well Jo, Diana here is very good at what she does and I need her but she’s also a little evil. I intend to wake her back up, give her Diana’s memories and take her home with me to live out Diana’s life while Diana Prime here builds me an army. Oh and does some other stuff.” said Shaun

“Yeah but what’s the point in waking her back up if you’re just going to give her the same memories?” asked Jo.

Diana said. “The version of me he finds won’t be as confident or experienced, she may have my memories and be me, thus functionally useful as an asset but she will still be a fresh faced young girl before the Farsh-nuke.”

Jo grimaced. “And us fresh faced young girls always fall before the Farsh-nuke, right? Is it too late to change my mind?”

“Yes.” said Diana with a smirk.

“No.” said Shaun as he glared at Diana.

“Actually I’ll just shut up” said Jo as she crossed her arms about herself..

After a while they arrived at Diana’s coffin.

Diana opened the coffin.

The woman in the box woke up. “Why are you me?”

“It’s a long story” said Diana Prime. “Get up.”

Diana did, she saw a young blonde woman and a young unfit man staring at her.

Diana Prime said. “Diana, this is Shaun Emmanuel, he is also known as the Farsh-nuke. Listen to him, obey him and for heaven’s sake don’t anger him. Now before you go I need to give you my memories and my blood. You are going to become a vampire.”

Diana Prime bit into the neck of the younger copy and sucked deeply, when she had finished the younger Diana was woozy and weak. Good, easier for the Farsh-nuke to manipulate.

“Now you bite me and suck my blood.” said Diana Prime.

The younger Diana did as she was bid and sucked until Diana Prime pulled away.

Diana Prime then pulled out a memory gun and shot her younger self in the head.

Diana looked at the woman with her face, the woman who had just shot her and realised why she now felt so horrible. The older woman had just shot everything that had happened to her since the backup was taken into Diana and that meant Diana felt the pity her older self had for her situation.

Diana Prime said. “I will have some choice selections delivered to you by tomorrow. Take me, take Diana, with you, pick up your girls then leave Diana to run things at the Vampire Guild. Spend tonight with your family. Tomorrow we prepare for war.”

“Oh and one last thing.” said Shaun casually. “While you’re helping me build an army, nursing Lucy and drinking Jo, see if you can find a way to kill me, kill the Farsh-nuke, dead. I am a moral man about to do some very horrible things in the name of the greater good. If I cross a line that can’t move back from, if I become irredeemably evil, I need to be dealt with.”

Shaun and Diana walked out of Diana’s hideaway home and retrieved Sammy and Jo Prime. Then Shaun took his girls back home.

*

Chapter 7
The New Deal

Shaun stepped through the front door and found a sign staked into the ground:

Shaun, find me in my room, we need to talk.

Shaun led the girls to Kirstin’s room, opened the door and found two women in bikinis lying on her double bed as she used the computer.

“So it’s not just me then that this happens to.” said Shaun absently.

“Oh, you’re home!” squeed Kirstin then she glomped him. “I’ve missed you, we need to talk but for now, yes, the girls are Candi Brooks and Cassie respectively. I also have three boys but that’s for later. Anyway look what I can do.”

Kirstin aimed her wand at Candi and fired, the woman shrank to the size of a doll.

Shaun picked up Candi, amazed. “You can do magic.”

He stroked Candi and held her up to his face. “Hello, little woman, I am your owner now. Pleased to meet you.”

He turned to Kirstin excited. “We should get a hamster cage!”

Kirstin smiled,. She loved seeing Shaun so happy. “And we have a cat. Say hello, Ron.”

A ginger moggy crawled out from a nook and sniffed Shaun then started attacking his hand.

Shaun laughed. “Cheeky blighter.” Then he leaned close to Kirstin and whispered. “Look we really need to talk, outside away from the Sylphs.”

Kirstin nodded.

Shaun gave Jo, Candi and walked out with Kirstin.

“I’m the Farsh-nuke.” said Shaun heavily.

“I’m Viorum Kaztif-Tan” said Kirstin with a shrug.

They talked all night.

*

They were woken by a loud honking. The computer bonged, stirring them awake then said “Lord Shaun and Lady Kirstin, a delivery van is waiting outside for you, what shall I tell the driver?”

Sammy stirred from her position curled up at the foot of the bed. “Shaun will be right down.”

Shaun seemed resolutely unable to wake, snoring as he lay between Jo and Kirstin.

Sammy crawled up Shaun’s sleeping body, then collapsed on top of him, she whispered in his ear. “Farsh-nuke, your girls are trying to sleep and Shaun is sleeping too, now is your time to take control.”

The Farsh-nuke smiled and opened his eyes. “Samsquela, you clever little girl. Just how much research did you do to get this job?”

Sammy just kissed his cheek then rested her head on his chest.

The Farsh-nuke sighed and got up.

It didn’t take him long to get showered and dressed, partly he guessed because the computer was deliberately speeding up time for him.

He greeted the delivery man in the suit he seemed to like to wear, must keep up appearances after all.

The delivery man was seven foot tall, very skinny, had an inch thick raggedy moustache and a baseball cap for some absurd team on his head. He was chewing gum and his truck was another jet powered cyborg whale thing.

“Got some coffins for you to sign for. Already unloaded them for you.” said the delivery man.

The Farsh-nuke looked to see where nine gothic style coffins sat piled up in a zone marked out by paint on the side of road as the: Quantum Teleport Bay.

The Farsh-nuke thanked the delivery man, signed for the package, waited for him to go then ran over to open the first coffin. It was nailed shut but the Farsh-nuke opened it easily. Sure enough inside he found a woman in a bikini.

The woman woke. “Hi, I’m -”

Th Farsh-nuke placed his finger on her lips. “I don’t care who you are and I am not who you need to speak to. I’m just the guy trying to make sure you and the others don’t get gibbed by quantum teleportation. Kindly explain so to the others. I need to get you all inside quickly”

While the woman was still processing what he said the Farsh-nuke had lifted her out of the coffin, placed her safely on the ground, checked for a false bottom then moved onto the next coffin. In less than a minute all nine of the women were out of the coffins. It took 30 seconds for the Farsh-nuke to restack the coffins in the appropriate order and beam them inside.

The women stood, dumbstruck.

The Farsh-nuke ran to the door and held it open then groaned as he saw the women not get his idea so he hissed “Ladies first.”

Now they took the hint.

The Farsh-nuke counted them in and as the ninth woman entered, a tenth approached. This one was dressed in a formal business suit and wore her brown hair in a bun.

She was holding a folder and glared at him. “Shaun Emmanuel, what is it with you and little girls?” She said it casually, as if it were a joke but the sting was obvious.

“You’re here about Candi Brooks?” asked the Farsh-nuke, confirming things.

“Yes.” said the lawyer dryly “Anywhere we can talk?”

“Came in to my parlor.” said the Farsh-nuke dryly.

The lawyer smiled curtly and entered.

The Farsh-nuke led the lawyer and the nine women who had just been delivered into a very large kitchen parlor.

“Do excuse me...” said the Farsh-nuke to the lawyer. “I really should take care of my delivery first.”

The lawyer smiled. “Of course, Sir”

The table was huge and the Farsh-nuke pulled out ten very large dinner plates, arraying them on the table. Then he turned to the women. “You were willing to sleep in coffins, I trust dinnerplates will not be an issue?”

The woman in the emerald green bikini shook her head. “You’re the Farsh-nuke and a vampire and you just want us to lie down on your dinner plate?”

The Farsh-nuke leaned in and whispered. “I am asking nicely. If I wanted to eat you there are a million ways I could do it. Now you are very pretty and I am sure very important to

Shaun's plans but I am not Shaun, I am the beast that lives inside his head. If you are obedient your fragile little sense of self and agency will be preserved. If you use that limited resource to disobey me you will swiftly find out what it means to annoy a god."

The Farsh-nuke leaned back then sighed. "Go willingly and the others will follow. Go unwillingly and I will have some fun."

The woman in the emerald green bikini climbed onto the dinner table then lay down on a plate. The Farsh-nuke then leaned over her, muttered something and touched her forehead. She fell asleep.

Then a woman in a banana yellow bikini lay down on a plate and was made to sleep by the Farsh-nuke.

The lawyer watched all nine women ascend then stared at the tenth plate. "I hope you don't expect me to lay down so willingly."

The Farsh-nuke shook his head and tutted "No, that would be too easy. The plate is a promise. Find a table, I'll get you something to drink."

The lawyer said. "I don't want anything to drink, thank you."

The Farsh-nuke nodded. "Fair enough but I do, won't be long."

The lawyer found a table for two and cleared it. She laid her folder on the table and started readying the forms.

The Farsh-nuke returned, flanked by Jo and Candi Brooks.

Candi was nervous and shaking like a leaf.

Jo was angry, contained only by the Farsh-nuke's strong hand on her right shoulder.

The lawyer wondered idly if the Farsh-nuke was strong enough to snap the girl's neck one handed. She hoped so. Better that the girl be more obedient and likely to live or be given a mercifully swift death than that she fought.

The Farsh-nuke sat on the chair opposite the lawyer and a slight pressure on Jo's shoulder made her kneel on the floor beside him. Candi climbed onto the table and towered over the lawyer then she shrank to a foot in height and the Farsh-nuke stowed a wand.

The Farsh-nuke smiled enigmatically. "Now I don't believe we have been properly introduced. I am the Farsh-nuke, Champion of the Sylphs, Guardian of the Multiverse, the man who makes the impossible probable and oh yes The Great Spanner In The Works. This is Joanne Montague - Razpief, formidable vampire hunter for five years running and now my pet. The charming little woman on table is Candi Brooks but I think you know her. The question is who are you?"

The lawyer smiled back "I am Christine Schapansky and I am the best lawyer Raspberry has in the entire multiverse."

The Farsh-nuke laughed. “How lucky for me that the best lawyer Raspberry has is a woman?”

Christine glared at him. “Law is always the slowest to reform because of the need to be so thoroughly free from bugs when it does reform and Raspberry, like the Logicios, is a massive powerful institution founded by an arrogant misogynistic man. For us to excel at our jobs and be noticed we have to be very good indeed. There’s a kind of social darwinism in it.”

The Farsh-nuke chuckled. “Well, begin..”

Christine handed the Farsh-nuke a thick sheaf of papers “These are the contracts she signed, Each very thick complicated forms and each signing away every single nuance and facet of her human rights, pet rights and rights as an individual.”

The Farsh-nuke flicked through them casually.

Christine handed him a tablet pc and showed him a public court approved youtube playlist “This is Candi Brooks before every judge in every city in every country verbally giving up her rights while under oath.”

The Farsh-nuke watched a video. It was a close up of Candi, a judge could be heard off camera “Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth before the great Septarchy, so help your ever lasting soul?”

The recording of Candi nodded enthusiastically and said cheerily “I do so solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth before the great Septarchy so help my ever lasting soul.”

A different voice from off camera now, probably a lawyer “Make your plea, Miss Brooks.”

The recording of Candi excitedly said. “I, Candi Brooks, being of sound mind and body, hereby wish to renounce the following rights and bequeath myself as legal property to the Raspberry corporation so they may use me as they wish. The rights I wish to renounce are as follows...”

The Farsh-nuke paused the video.

Christine handed a thick hard drive to the Farsh-nuke. “This is a complete recording of every microsecond of Candi’s life from five years before Raspberry approached her until you stole her from us. There’s brain activity records, sweat records, how often she peed, what colour her piss was and how it was made up.”

The Farsh-nuke nodded.

Christine handed another even bigger hard drive over to him “And this is the same but for every Interference Agent, lawyer and politician that looked over our activity in this matter.”

The Farsh-nuke smiled cheerily and tapped it gratefully.

Christine pulled out another thick sheaf of papers “And this is every report and legal form that was signed by every Interference Agent, lawyer and politician that looked over our

activity in this matter. They all approved. They all found our treatment of Miss Brooks kind, courteous and respectful of her human rights well before we approached her about this matter and all agreed that there was no drop in quality of our treatment of Miss Brooks after she signed away her rights and became our legal property, indeed many claim that our treatment of her improved dramatically."

Christine sat back like a cat who had got the cream. "We have been very thorough, Mister Farsh-nuke. This is completely legal and if you fight this those same resources will turn on you and your family."

The Farsh-nuke nodded and smiled.

"And don't think your little show was ever going to work on me. I have every resource at Raspberry's command watching me. If you try to hurt me physically you will be restrained in a microsecond. I know you think you're safe because the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association needs you but they are quite capable of restraining you without damaging you and as cold as you may be you still have a heart that can be broken." said Christine with a nod to Jo.

The Farsh-nuke leaned back, rested his head in his hands. "I'm impressed. It takes a lot to impress me, Christine, it really does but you've done it. So I'm going to make you an offer..."

Christine glared at him. "I did not come here to negotiate, I came here to reclaim Raspberry's property."

The Farsh-nuke ignored her. "I need an army, I need a really really large army. I need weaponary. I need uniforms. I need infrastructure. I could use you, use your plan. You would profit naturally, well Raspberry would profit, I have another plan for you. Just hear me out."

Christine smiled like a shark that could sense fresh blood. "The Farsh-nuke needs something from us? Oh, do tell?"

Christine leaned forward now.

The Farsh-nuke leaned forward and stroked Candi. "The slightest pressure of my fingers and she will be dead in an instant. I don't like to negotiate at the end of a gun barrel."

Christine stared at him. "They will murder everyone in this place."

The Farsh-nuke stared back at her. "And if I don't have the breathing room, agency and confidence I need the entire multiverse goes PHOOM!" The Farsh-nuke was cold and furious but calm about it. "Sterilise the entirety of the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association for all I care. The moment I snap her neck all the work you have done, all the money you have spent, is rendered null and void. There will be no choice left for you but to listen to my offer seriously. So listen, Christine, listen and save the life of your property."

Candi squirmed under the Farsh-nuke's fingers.

Christine nodded. "I will listen."

The Farsh-nuke nodded and looked down at Candi, he picked her up, laid her on her back and tickled her belly. “I will let you have Candi, I will let you sell her, I will buy 45% of the stock you sell and I will naturally look after Candi myself. I don’t care how good a lawyer you are, corporations should not own people. Once the precedent is set up, you let me sell you women. These women can be sold as merchandise, used in films, kept as pets or toys by Raspberry employees but I get 45% of all sold with a minimum gift of merchandise of ten million units.”

Christine stared at him/ “That is a pretty big ask, Farsh-nuke, I’m sorry. Ten million units of every woman you give us plus 45% of all stock that you provide us? And naturally Raspberry is not going to let you keep Candi.”

The Farsh-nuke nodded. “I thought not. I hoped I wouldn’t have to do this. I feel very dirty making this offer but if you accept my offer then if there is still a Raspberry when it happens the Unleasher will be Raspberry’s to own. The standard rate would apply, ten million units to my estate and another 45% of all stock sold there after.”

Christine’s mouth dropped. “You would sell the Unleasher to Raspberry. Are you mad? This isn’t like agreeing to work with them. They will literally legally possess you.”

The Farsh-nuke nodded. “The Unleasher won’t like it, she will try to fight it, she’ll probably win if all ten million and one of her work together but there is just a chance she will acknowledge the agreement, if only long enough to grant Raspberry control of say 40 million Unleashers.”

Christine nodded. “How refreshingly honest, you’re selling Raspberry on a massive legal gamble. Very well. What do you want with me?”

The Farsh-nuke smiled. “The tenth plate.”

Christine stared at him. “You can’t be serious?”

The Farsh-nuke chuckled darkly. “Christine, I am not a corporation, I am not a lawyer, I am not human and I do not even truly exist but what I am is very old and very powerful and very keen on Sylphs. We could use you, use your skills, protect this operation of mine and I could make you very happy.”

Chrine smiled sadly. “I work for Raspberry, Farsh-nuke, you can’t compete.”

The Farsh-nuke nodded. “It was a worth a try, goodbye Miss Schapanky.”

Christine got up to leave. Kirtin was barring her way. Sammy was beside her, Cassie too.

“Have you met my fiance, Viorum Kaztif-Tan?” said the Farsh-nuke casually. “The omni-gendered deity of order and balance. The god and goddess of all lawyers. She’s going to be a great sorceror you know. Her power will only be matched by mine.”

Kirstin smiled the smile of a woman about to cut the hair of the one that had an affair with her boyfriend. “Christine, sit the fuck back down.”

Christine swallowed and sat back down.

Kirstin towered over the sitting Christine. “Raspberry is a very clever company but I am smarter. Women grow up being told how to lie their way through the world. How to get what they want through diplomacy. If Raspberry says they want your soul to make you rich and famous you sign on the dotted line because success always means giving up some measure of dignity. Candi may have willingly sold herself to Raspberry but she did not willingly become the product you want. I was there, I saw her hesitation and discomfort, so did Cassie here, as did the whole class. Now the Farsh-nuke here has made you a very generous offer but I have a counter offer. You accept his basic proposal but Candi is our legal property and the Unleasher never becomes property of Raspberry.”

Christine laughed nervously. “Why would Raspberry ever agree to that?”

“Because if they don’t, we kill you.” said Kirstin casually. “And then they have to ask themselves why they were so stupid as to attempt to make deals with gods capable of altering the very fabric of reality with a single thought over what amounts to a very stupid woman.”

Christine stared at her. “Raspberry wouldn’t let you! Interference wouldn’t let you!”

“Just how would they stop us?” asked Kirstin. “You are presuming that we are not omniscient and omnipotent?”

“So I die then?” said Christine bluntly. “Raspberry will never agree to this.”

Sammy presented a wrapped present box to Christine.

Christine opened the box and pulled out a bikini, a pill in a clear plastic box and a collar with her name on it.

Christine turned to the Farsh-nuke angrily. “All this because I wouldn’t work for you!?”

The Farsh-nuke threw his hands up. “Hey, I had nothing to do with this, I was prepared to deal.”

“There is an observation multiversally made that the morally good are constrained by their morals. Limited. Hamstrung.” said Kirstin wryly “They’re all wrong of course. The truly evil don’t give a shit so they will always follow the path of least resistance, solve things diplomatically when they can. It’s the good people you have to watch out for. The ones who see the world in all its shades of grey and decide white is best. Those people are driven by morality and a sense of right and wrong. To them morality is not merely an unfortunate necessity of civilisation or biochemistry. It is in fact an ideal, a faith, a cause to be rallied behind and how many trillions have died in the name of such things? Ha. You thought he was the bad cop, asking you to lay on his plate but the Farsh-nuke has more care for his harvest than I will EVER have for the woman who defends slavery. Take the pill and be thankful the Farsh-nuke likes you.”

Christine turned to the Farsh-nuke. “I guess you win.”

Christine swallowed the Sylph pill, walked across to the large dining table, climbed onto it and fell asleep.

The Farsh-nuke looked sheepishly at Kirstin. “Sorry. Not a great first impression, was it?”

Kirstin took the seat Christine vacated and stared into the Farsh-nuke's emerald green eyes. "Did you call me your fiance?"

The Farsh-nuke blushed. "Crap"

Kirstin took his hands in hers. "No, it's okay. I was thinking of asking myself. Didn't realise you felt the same way?"

"I'm not Shaun." said the Farsh-nuke hurriedly.

"I know." said Kirstin with a smile. "Shaun can ask me in his own time but I saw what you did. You offered yourself to secure Candi and the deal you needed. That's very noble."

The Farsh-nuke shrugged. "Humans love power. I knew that Raspberry would come for me in time if I made a deal with them so I let them think I was sacrificing myself, not getting the deal signed early while I still had control."

Kirstin kissed him on the cheek. "Thank you, all the same. Now, may I please speak to Shaun?"

The Farsh-nuke closed his eyes and seemed to fall limp.

Shaun awoke with a start, realised where he was and proceeded to freak out.

Kirstin put her finger on Shaun's lips, silencing him. "It's okay, The Farsh-nuke just accepted a delivery while you were asleep, they're lying on the table. Only wake the ones in the bikinis, I'm off to the Guild, Look after Candi and Jo for me."

Shaun nodded. "Listen, if he ever hurts you..."

Kirstin stroked Shaun's cheek. "You forget, babe, I am Viorum Kaztif-Tan. The Farsh-nuke couldn't hurt me if he wanted to."

Shaun nodded and watched Kirstin, Cassie and Sammy leave.

When they had gone Jo said. "Shaun I know what happened yesterday and while I don't like it, I understand why you did it. With the fate of reality at stake you gamble whatever chips you have. Just, next time ask me?"

Shaun tried to explain. "I couldn't-"

"I know..." said Jo gently. "I see now that you have to work in the shadows and you couldn't let me ruin things but you still should have told me, even if you then had to wipe my memory after I agreed. I need to trust you, Shaun, trust you more than I trust myself."

"Alright." said Shaun heavily. "I won't hide anything from you ever again. Which reminds me. Do you remember what you were like when you first joined the Vampire game?"

Jo laughed. "Oh yeah I was so young and naive, I seriously thought I was Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Why do you ask?"

“I met her yesterday.” said Shaun carefully. “The Vampire Guild keeps backups of everyone who joins, I guess in case somebody gets traumatized. I needed Diana’s help and I had to offer her something. Something very important that would mean a lot to Diana so I woke your backup, made her aware of the situation and offered her to Diana. She agreed and I left her there to act as Diana’s regular bottle of wine.”

Jo was stunned into silence.

Shaun got up from his chair and took Candi with him. Time to see what had arrived.

Nine staggeringly beautiful women were arrayed on dinner plates, each wearing a different colour of bikini.

He approached the woman in the green bikini first. She had strawberry blond hair and a lined, angular face. He kissed her on the forehead. She stirred.

Shaun stood straight, didn’t want to spook the poor woman.

She woke and sat up.

Shaun met her gaze. He was nervous and concerned.

“Shaun?” asked the woman cautiously.

Shaun nodded. “Look I don’t know what I did but I’m sorry, you shouldn’t be here I’ll send you home.”

She shook her head. “No, you don’t understand, we arrived in coffins.”

Understanding bloomed on Shaun’s face. So Diana had been telling the truth.

“You would be the choice cuts Diana said she’d send round then?” asked Shaun.

She chuckled. “Yes, something like that. Shaun, I am General Eliza Hernandez. I joined The Vampire Club after sacrificing myself for my country and finding myself in the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association and wanting some way to feed the old passion. Diana chose me first, I helped her select the rest. May I leave the plate?”

“Of course.” said Shaun as if she’d just asked the most ridiculous question.

Eliza climbed off the table. “Then I suggest you wake the women in Blue and Purple next.”

“Alright.” said Shaun and he gently kissed the foreheads of the women dressed in blue and purple bikinis respectively.

The woman in the blue bikini looked around cautiously then sat up. “Sir?”

Shaun looked sideways at Eliza.

Eliza chuckled. “That is Roberta Nichols. Esteemed scholar on the Septagonoids. The woman in purple pretending she’s still asleep is Michelle Franks, architect by trade and engineer by passion.”

Shaun squeed. “A Trinity of experts to help me in this war. Thank you. I will see to it that you each get your own room and can plan together.”

Michelle sat up at this and scooted off the table. She hugged Shaun. “When that Vampire woke me I thought my life would be spent having my blood drunk. Thank you.”

Shaun patted Michelle awkwardly. “It’s quite alright. You’re safe now. I thank you for your service.”

Eliza said. “Wake up White, Grey and Black next.”

Shaun kissed the foreheads of the indicated women.

White woke up, saw Shaun and glomped him.

Grey woke up, scooted off the dining table and started studying the parlor.

Black woke up and sat on her dinnerplate as she watched Shaun.

Shaun frowned, he stroked the cheek of the woman glomping him “Hey, it’s nice to meet you too but who are you?”

The woman in white nuzzled him with her face, “Do you honestly care, Farsh-nuke? I am a fan of Sylphs like you, and I was a Doctor before I came here.”

Eliza added. “Her name is Esmerelda Du Pont. She was chosen to look after the Sylphs in our care. With your permission I would like to have her turned into a Sylph so we might replicate her as needed. This one would naturally be yours.”

Shaun shook his head. “A resource this important needs a mistress with time to dedicate towards her.”

Eliza stared at Shaun. “I have a war to plan, legionnaires to train.”

Shaun stared back at her. “And I have you, the Vampire game and these other plates I keep spinning in the air.”

“Fine.” said Eliza then she tickled Esmerelda under her chin. “Could you be happy as this old war hero’s Sylph?”

Esmerelda glomped Eliza.

The woman in grey found Shaun and introduced herself. “Nice kitchen you have here, I am Victoria Gladring. I will be the cook in charge of keeping your troops well fed. The shy one still sitting on her tray is my wife Amanda. She’s an amazing farmer, she will find a way to get me the ingredients necessary.”

Shaun shook her hand. “Good woman.”

“The remaining three are gifts to your beneficence. You have the leaders of a war and the people to look after warriors. The other three were bought along because they look good

and are very strong willed, confident and independent. Have fun with them.” said Eliza happily.

Shaun nodded and woke the woman in the yellow bikini.

“You seem different” said the woman. “Am I addressing the organ grinder or the monkey?”

“You are addressing Shaun, who do I have the pleasure of addressing?” asked Shaun

“Britney Leyton at your service. I am a very up and coming popstar, what may I do for you?”” said the woman in the yellow bikini.

Shaun grinned. “Britney, tell me who do you think I am and why do you think you were sent to me?”

Britney back flipped off the table to land behind Shaun. “You are the Farsh-nuke, Champion of the Sylphs, you have a big war to fight and I was chosen to be your toy. A piece of chewing gum to keep stress at bay as you fight for the safety of all reality.”

Shaun turned to her, impressed. “And you’re okay with that? That I will tame you and eventually remove all your free will as I bend you to mine?”

Britney shrugged. “Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly, Farsh-nukes gotta tame and sylphs gotta obey. You have to fight a war for the sake of all reality. We all have to play our part. My part is just one where I get to live and love and give my will to one worthy of wielding it.” She leaned close and smirked. “I warn you though I won’t make it easy for you. You need to do this properly, get every last drop of free will out of me. Give it back after if you like, I don’t mind, but don’t waste the opportunity I’m giving you.”

Shaun clapped appreciatively. “You certainly have a skill for oratory but I have three rules. 1. If danger is present you obey without question. Games are not worth dying for. 2. If we are in public and I start having fun, try and be discrete. 3. Never lose sight of who you are. I don’t want you to lose yourself in my games. It’s fine to have fun but not if you end up going mad.”

Britney nodded. “As you wish, Sir.”

Shaun kissed the forehead of the woman in pink. There was no reaction.

Britney sighed. “Amy quit playing, this is Shaun.”

Amy opened an eye, she saw Shaun looking down at her. She scooted down the dinner plate and off the edge of the table then made to run.

Britney yelled after her. “Amy! Amy, stop!”

Amy turned to Britney and sighed. “What? We’re supposed to play hard to get.” Then she ran out the room.

Britney rolled her eyes. “Look I’ll go explain your rules to Amy, just wait here.”

Shaun kissed the forehead of the woman in the orange bikini.

She woke up and saw the other plates were empty. “Saved the best for last eh? You have the pleasure of addressing Callisto. I joined the Vampire Club after my best friends were eaten alive by Diana. She said that if I gave myself to you, let you tame me then you would kill her.”

Shaun shook his head sadly. “The only things I intend to kill are Septagonoids. I might however be able to soothe your mind.”

“Why?”

“Because Diana feeds on the Sylphs that I first tamed” said Shaun.

Callisto leapt to her feet and stared down at Shaun. A hawk spying her prey. “So she ate your friends too but you refuse to hurt her.”

Shaun shook his head. “I have hurt Diana deeply and I regret it, I hate the pain and fear I made her suffer.”

Callisto jumped off the table and looked Shaun in the eyes. “Then you know a wisdom I have yet to find. Do with me as you will, Master.”

Shaun beamed. “It would be a pleasure.”

Britney arrived back with Amy.

Amy bowed her head submissively. “I am sorry, Master, I will endeavor to be a better plaything.”

Britney sighed. “No, see that’s too far round the other side now.”

Shaun chuckled, “Amy can act however she wishes. Now get on the dinner plate before me, all three of you.”

Callisto and Britney jumped onto the dinnerplate. Amy clambered up onto it.

Shaun shrank Callisto, Amy and Britney with his wand and proceeded to pick them up and stuff them in his pockets.

Candi poked her head out and said, “Hey I appreciate you looking after me and all but there isn’t exactly room in here for two of us.”

Michelle said. “Actually if you’d let me borrow a couple of your pets I think I could work out a better system of storing them.”

Eliza stared at her. “Them? What do you mean by them? There is only us. We are all soldiers in this war and don’t think for a moment that you are somehow better than them because the Farsh-nuke isn’t currently playing with you.”

Michelle sighed. “Well, when it comes to be my turn as the plaything I’d rather I wasn’t just shoved roughly into a pocket. Please, Shaun, I’d like to help.”

Shaun nodded and handed over Callisto and Amy.

“Thank you.” said Candi.

Shaun said “Look I have to go. but you guys have free reign to do whatever you need to do and remember you are allowed to wear clothes. Jo, are you coming with me?”

“Probably not” said Jo honestly.

“Alright” said Shaun and he strode out on his way to the Vampire Club.

*

Chapter 8
GI Jane

As Shaun walked to the Vampire Club he had a lot of things to think about so he failed to notice the woman charging, equally determinedly in his direction. They walked into each other and she fell, dropping books and papers all over the place. Shaun reached out instinctively and stopped her fall then pulled her to her feet.

She was tall and dressed in cowboy boots, jeans, a tanktop and a hoodie.

“That was my fault, sorry” said the woman “I’m researching a new paper on the effects of Sylphs on society.”

She bent down to pick up her books and papers.

Shaun paused just long enough to admire her then started helping her pick her stuff up.

The woman noticed the way he looked at her and said. “You know you have the eyes of a hawk?”

Shaun smiled at that. “I’m Shaun Emmanuel, I just moved here.”

“Nice to meet you, Shaun” said the woman. “I’m Sally White”

Shaun nodded. “Nice name, Sally”

Shaun helped her with her stuff then said. “Well, Sally. I need to be going to the Vampire Club. I hope your paper goes well.”

Sally smiled and waved as he left but there was something about him, an intensity to his gaze, a hunger that she was very curious about.

*

When Shaun returned home from the Vampire Club that day he found an old fat man in his house talking to Eliza and the others.

Shaun spoke up. “Sir, you are either very brave or very foolish. Why are you in my house?”

“I am, or rather was, Christine’s immediate superior. Frank Dobbs, at your service. I’ve been demoted in light of my poor handling of the situation. Very foolish of me to try and play two gods.” said the man casually. “I have the papers transferring legal ownership of Candi Brooks to you. We have enough scans to make merchandise of her as it is and I hope we can rent her from you to make other movies in future but I didn’t just come here to fall on my sword. Shaun, somebody knows about you, what you’ve been doing. We intercepted her in her home and have her in one of our interrogation cells. It’s your call.”

Shaun tried to process all this then said. “Take me to her, we can sign Candi’s papers on the way over.”

*

Sally White was sitting in the interrogation room looking immensely bored.

Shaun saw this through one way glass and asked Frank. “What do you make of her?”

Frank shrugged “Well she’s a hell of a good journalist and very tenacious and patient. I think she could blow this whole thing wide open. We have to be very careful.”

Shaun shook his head. “That isn’t what I meant. Look at her. The shape of her head. The length of her bones. The angle of her shoulders. I think we can use her.”

Frank stared at Shaun like he was nuts. “This chick knows enough about what we’re doing to get us all shamed and you want to put her through every court in the land?”

Shaun patted Frank on the back and stared at Sally. “Relax. I hooked her without even trying. Get your team ready. I want to do some tests first, determine her usefulness then I’ll pop the question and very probably be expecting ten million units plus 45% of all stock sold as per my deal.”

Frank groaned. “I am starting to wish you’d slap a collar round my neck, save me the whipping from the higher ups.”

Shaun entered the interrogation room. “Pleasure to meet you, Sally. Sorry about the confusion.”

Sally greeted him like an old friend then said. “Why did googling your name result in my being abducted and interrogated?”

Shaun put his arm around her and said. “Lets walk.”

Sally nodded and walked with him out the interrogation room to the car park.

Shaun explained on the way “Sally, you noted earlier that I have the eyes of a hawk? Well, you’re right. I am a predator and you are my prey. I can’t say exactly why just yet but I want you for something big, something that a lot of people are keen does not go public. So obvious questions out of the way first. I already have a girlfriend, we are happily monogamous and I have more than enough Sylphs to satisfy me.”

Sally nodded, understanding. “That explains a lot. There’s just one thing though, you know

where I live. You surely have quite the force of arms. Couldn't you just take what you wanted from me by force?"

Shaun shook his head "You have to give it to me willingly."

Sally relaxed now and she asked. "So how am I going home?"

Shaun leaned close and whispered. "Close your eyes."

Sally closed her eyes and woke to find she was laying on her bed in her room. A hastily scrawled note said. "Call me." and gave a number.

*

Shaun received Sally's phone call the next day as he was on a hunt and arranged to meet up that night.

They met at a Chinese buffet. Sally wore pinstriped trousers, high heels, a tight tanktop and an emerald green cardigan. Shaun wore his frock coat and 3 piece suit. He also carried a large hold all with him.

Sally laughed at the hold all. "You know size doesn't matter right, you could fit a universe inside an electron. Having a hold all that big is just making a statement."

Shaun nodded. "You're right it is. So food? I'm going to head up to get mine, I've bought you a starter though..."

Shaun unzipped the hold all and bought out a plain cardboard box. "See how you go with some of that and water, then grab a starter."

Sally poured some of the contents of the box out into a bowl. It looked like breakfast cereal. She dipped her spoon into it then sluiced the cereal into her mouth.

When Shaun returned with his food Sally was finishing off the last of the cereal.

Sally stared at him, muddy water dripping down her chin. "Shaun, I don't know what this is or where you get it but it's lovely."

Shaun smiled. "I'm very glad you like it, now maybe get some proper food. I think you deserve it."

Sally looked at Shaun curiously. "Because I liked your cereal?"

Shaun chuckled. "Because you liked my cereal."

Sally shrugged and got her food.

They talked into the night and when Sally was full they left.

"Well I guess this is good night." said Sally as they left the restaurant.

"No, you're coming home with me." said Shaun

Sally stared at him nervously. “This is where you get what you need from me, isn’t it?”

“Nah.” said Shaun dismissively. “I still have some tests to run first.”

“Right...” said Sally nervously. “I should go. I should really really go.”

Shaun nodded. “Probably should/”

Sally took the cab to Shaun’s house with him.

They arrived on the estate and Sally said. “You could hide out from the zombie apocalypse in here. So massive.”

Shaun chuckled.

Once inside Sally was greeted by a whole harem of women.

Shaun introduced them “Sally White meet Kirstin- my beautiful girlfriend, Eliza -an amazing general, Roberta- an expert on Septagonoids, Michelle- our architect and engineer, Esmerelda- Sylph in charge of caring for Sylphs and Victoria and Amanda- The women who made that cereal you liked so much. I also have some Sylphs I keep solely for pleasure. Those being Sammy, Jo, Cassie, Britney, Amy and Callisto. There are also some boys around here somewhere but as you might imagine that is more Kirstin’s department than mine.”

Sally swallowed. “I should have left.”

“Yep.” said Shaun with a smirk. “For what it’s worth, noone’s stopping you from leaving.”

Sally laughed. “They don’t need to. I am going to decide to be yours of my own free will and volition aren’t I?”

“I hope so.” said Shaun with a nod. “Now are you ready for the tests?”

Sally shrugged. “Why not?”

The first tests were pretty standard medical check up stuff and a stint on the firing range under Eliza then things got weird. First Roberta tested how she reacted to the influence of pure logic. It took about 5 minutes to succumb. Then Kirstin turned her into a horse and Michelle canted her round the yard. Esmerelda had then calmed her back down to sanity in thirty minutes.

Esmerelda notified Shaun that Sally was recovered and he came to receive her.

“Sorry about that, can’t be easy getting turned into a horse.”

Sally sighed. “I don’t think it would actually be that bad if I got to devote my whole life to being a horse but as a holiday I wouldn’t recommend it.”

Shaun nodded compassionately. “Well, there’s just a couple of tests left then I can make you the offer we both know you won’t refuse.”

“Oh goody!” cried Sally sarcastically “You don’t have to sound so fucking pleased about it.”

“You can leave.” said Shaun, mollified.

Sally leaned forward and glared at him. “But I won’t. I know I won’t. Everyone who has run these tests on me knows I won’t. The point though is just because you’re going to choose to do something doesn’t mean you can’t feel grief at the decision you choose. Oh, don’t give me that puppy dog expression, let’s go. See if I pass the last test.”

Shaun led Sally to a heated room and lay down in a special armchair, he swung something like a mattress over his lap and locked it into place over some rests.

“What are you going to do?” asked Sally, nervously.

“Eat you.” said Shaun bluntly

Sally stared at him, horrified.

“Not completely, obviously.” said Shaun gently. “I just need to know how you would react if times became tough and somebody needed to eat you. So come on, lie down on the dinner plate.”

Sally stared at Shaun for a long moment then she stripped down to her underwear and climbed onto the mattress come dinner plate.

“To cook the food I am going to use acid and an electric current to heat up your chest and use it as a hob” said Shaun clinically.

Sally stared at him once more then sighed. “Bon appetite”

Shaun applied an electrical current.

Sally felt first tingling then warmth before finally a bright hot pain. She wanted to scream, wanted to call out but she was too curious. She had to know what it was he wanted. What was it he needed so badly that cooking her alive and eating her was just a test?

Sally felt the fork stab into her thigh, felt the knife slice through her flesh and the momentary warmth as her blood seeped from the wound. Another downward slash then a horizontal cut then a tearing as the chuck of thigh was pulled free from her leg. The blood flowed freely now but Shaun didn’t care. Shaun was frying her leg meat on her chest now.

She heard Shaun chew the meat and heard as he declared. “Not bad, a bit gamey but not bad.”

Then Shaun was helping her sit up.

The acid sluiced down into her crotch, Sally refused to scream. She might be utterly at his mercy, nearly naked before him, her cunt on fire, her thigh bleeding profusely but she had dignity and pride.

Shaun fed her the last chunk of the flesh he’d just cooked.

Not bad at all.

“What happens now?” asked Sally curiously.

“That is not your concern” said Shaun “Just close your eyes and you will wake up hale and hearty in your own bed.”

Sally closed her eyes.

*

Sally woke up in her own bed with Shaun standing over her.

It took a moment but suddenly Sally was aware that she was perfectly fit and healthy again.

“I kept my word” said Shaun quietly.

Sally nodded. “Did I pass?”

Shaun chuckled. “Yes, Sally, you passed.”

“Then why aren’t you... Doing whatever it is you want to do with me?” asked Sally curiously.

Shaun shrugged “Because I am the Farsh-nuke and I can be pretty hard to say no to. Go, live your life for at least a day, hopefully a week, then when you know the life you’ll be giving up, come find me.”

*

Two days later Frank Dobbs stopped by Shaun’s house again and Shaun was led to an interrogation room.

Shaun entered the interrogation room.

Sally saw him and said. “Hey, I wasn’t trying to find you. You said ‘Know the life you’re missing’ So here I am researching Sylphs for my paper again.”

“I’m not here to have a go” said Shaun with a smile.

He led Sally to the cafeteria. They found a table for two and Shaun pulled out two seats for either side.

“Who is sitting there?” asked Sally.

Shaun pulled a shrunken woman out of each pocket. “This is Britney and Candi, they help me with my stress.”

He restored the women to full size.

Britney sat on Shaun’s right.

Candi sat on Shaun's left.

"Hi." said Britney cheerily.

Candi just stared at Sally.

Sally stared at Shaun. "You always manage to surprise me."

Shaun said. "You deserve some answers. First off I am a reincarnation of the Farsh-nuke, my girlfriend Kirstin is Viorum Kaztif-Tan. We are preparing to wage war with the Septagonoids. We don't want to panic anyone, or more importantly spook the Septagonoids, so we are working in the shadows but at this point that knowledge is worthless to you."

Sally nodded. "Makes sense. So what isn't worthless?"

"The woman on my left is one Candi Brooks and she legally signed away all her rights and is now the legal property of Raspberry or rather was until we came to a deal." Shaun pulled a thick folder out of a pocket and dropped it on the table before Sally. "This is a copy of everything Raspberry gave me to prove irrefutably that legally Candi Brooks belongs to them."

Sally opened the folder and started flicking through it.

Shaun said. "Now you can walk away today and use what I've just given you to try and bring down Raspberry. I will back you every step of the way and even provide some witnesses that Candi was not so willing. This is what Raspberry doesn't want you to know, this is why you should go home and carry on living your life because this could make you."

Sally stared at him. "You're trying to push me away, aren't you? Trying to give me the big scoop to go away with but there's still an elephant in the room that we aren't addressing. Tell me, what is it? What is so big a sacrifice that the man who keeps women in his pockets would destroy Raspberry to try and avoid?"

"You." said Shaun simply. "Legally."

Sally took a moment to process this. "But you can give me a Sylph pill if want -?"

Shaun shook his head.

Sally asked. "Then what?"

"I have a deal with Raspberry." said Shaun carefully. "If I find someone suitable and they approve then that person will be shrunk, mechanically switched off but not actually killed, then manufactured on a truly industrial scale. I get at least ten million units then 45% of all stock sold there after. This can only be done if I let Raspberry's lawyers do the legwork of legally signing that person over to me."

Sally stared at him, not comprehending his meaning.

Shaun sighed. "Sally, you are beautiful, smart and driven. You love the cereal my cook

and farmer make. You aren't that bad a shot, you make a good horse, you remain composed under pain and humiliation. You are kind, friendly, loyal and obedient. Having ten million of you would really speed up progress on preparing for this war. Then I could actually get some soldiers signed up."

Sally spoke slowly and carefully. "Let me get this right? You want me to sign away all my rights as a human? As a living being? So that you can legally own me and mass produce me on an industrial scale with Raspberry's help?"

"Yep." said Shaun. "If the war wasn't literally for the sake of all reality I would never dream of making such an offer."

Sally nodded. "Legal ownership of another human being, that is quite something even for the Farsh-nuke. How likely am I to die?"

"You personally? I won't let you. The other ten million plus? Useful, wanted, but ultimately expendable." said Shaun bluntly.

"That's why you saw whether I could be used as the stove upon which to cook my own flesh." mused Sally. "I'm not meant to fight or drive tanks, I'm meant to be a generally useful person who can, if needs must, be eaten before the more valuable troops."

Shaun didn't say anything, he didn't want to influence her one way or another. He just stared at her.

Sally snorted. "The final test eh? You could have groomed me, introduced the idea slowly but no you wait for the big reveal, the moment when you will actually pop the big question to drop the bombshell because I need to stare the stark harsh reality of my choice in the face. I am going to legally belong to you, be mass produced for you, work fight and die for you. No wonder you kept pushing me away. I have to be completely willing or this doesn't work."

Shaun said nothing.

Sally asked. "When I say yes, what will personally happen to me?"

Shaun said. "I leave you in the change of Frank Dobbs and after lots of form filling and pledging to tell the truth before judges you will legally be my property then Raspberry will probably want to make a film or seven with you, after that you'll join my retinue personally to have and to hold until the war is over."

Sally nodded. "Sounds like a good life. Shall we walk there now?"

Shaun cried out. "What!?"

"I want to do it." said Sally casually. "Fate of all reality and all that."

Shaun sighed. "I didn't actually expect this to work. I mean I wanted it to obviously but-"

Britney laughed. "Don't mind the ungrateful bastard. I for one welcome you heartily. Stop by between films, won't you?"

“Of course.” said Sally with a smile. “Now come on, allonsy.”

*

Chapter 9
Happily Ever After

A week later Shaun reclined on his bed and massaged Britney as Jo sat beside him and played Skyrim.

Shaun had spent everyday since he’d first met Sally in the Vampire Club making a name for himself claiming new prizes from the cattle. Every man and woman he bought down would be deliberately messed with. Throat torn open, blood drunk, bones broken, chunks of flesh torn out in bites. They screamed in pain when bought down and the fights would last long enough to be noticed, then his prey would be paraded before the Vampire Guild and he would toast to them. The vampires loved all that, the bloody violence and utter destruction of their foes.

Shaun of course was far more merciful than he let on and after his first bungled attempt had nearly killed a woman Jo had arranged a meeting with the cattle guild. Shaun told them everything, that he was the Farsh-nuke that his girlfriend was Viorum Kaztif-Tan, that he was building an army and more importantly he told them of his plans. Become the accepted leader of the Vampire Guild then introduce a new Rule: Everyone who is taken in the game of Vampire joins his legion, including vampires taken by cattle. Since traumatised soldiers don’t make the best soldiers Shaun would put an end to the needless violence, fighting for survival was fair enough but butchering an opponent who had already lost in a fit of bloodlust would be stopped.

Shaun’s recent victories for the guild therefore were a sham. Shaun took out the cattle that provided passive resistance like heavily fortified safe houses and the cattle who had clearly been traumatized by Diana and were driven by revenge. Shaun needed a training ground for warriors, not a breeding ground for cattle or hatred. The cattle were not exactly wrestlers throwing fights, rather they were victims offered a way out of suffering. Kirstin had taught him how to switch off pain in people and Shaun used it in battle. He really did tear their throats out but they did not feel a thing.

Kirstin had spent every day at the Mages Guild quietly letting it be known that she was looking to own some Sylphs by slipping them notes then taking them when they agreed. Everyone she captured continued attending the Guild of course. Each initiate wizard she had swear submissiveness and obedience towards her was an investment. So far all her Sylphs were continuing to develop as magicians but if one ever did quit or get kicked out Kirstin would given them to Shaun so they might teach his soldiers what little they knew.

Jo had elected to postpone taking the Sylph pill after the things Shaun had done to her for the greater good but she did admire his enterprise and was genuinely getting to know him as an equal. Playing video games was a new experience to her and she enjoyed the catharsis of being in control of the simulated violence.

Eliza had spent each day training the others to fight. Roberta had spent each day researching the Septagonoids further and gaining intel on the wider war the Logicios were engaged in. There seemed to be roughly 5 fronts:

The Logicio Expanse that covered maybe 70% of the multiverse.

The Architects of Chaos Defensive Line that roughly closed off the perimeter around the Parallel Universe Blocks of the multiverse.

The United Civilisations of the Multiverse - a chuck of universes totallying roughly 5% of the multiverse's total size who were on a mission to form a wider force with which to fight the Septagonoids and hopefully force the Logicios to reform.

The Pan Multiverse Good Time Association Protective Halo - a rough halo of warships that extended out of the multiverse to a diameter from the center of the multiverse of roughly 5% of the length of the Multiverse. This line existed ostensibly to extend the protection of the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association to the wider multiverse but was in reality showing the Logicios just how good their warships were in case the Logicios ever felt like stopping by to fill up on Sylphs.

Then there was the Quantum Foam. Essentially the Quantum Foam was what happened when a near infinite number of universes had a very tiny chance of developing people capable of travelling the multiverse for whatever reason. A lot of people were utterly unprepared for the majesty and danger of the multiverse but roughly 10 percent of the Quantum Foam travellers had at least seen enough science fiction to recognize an evil army of robots and try to destroy them. The Quantum Foam was largely more of an inconvenience to the Septagonoids than an actual threat. Like waking up at 4 am and finding a talking rat is trying to kill you except with the fact that very occasionally the talking rat was a reincarnation of one of the Septarchy and thus had powers that made them an outside context incident, like if after getting used to killing these talking rats one of them can walk through walls and use the technology in your own home to kill you. There were quite a few times when the Septagoids had looked set to wipe out the multiverse only for the Quantum Foam to ruin all their plans,

Michelle had been busy designing the army barracks for the soldiers that would be flooding in soon. And in her downtime she would work on improving the quality of life for Shaun's Sylphs with the help of Amy and Callisto.

Esmerelda was working with Victoria and Amanda to design foods and snacks for Sally to enjoy in all the forms she would have. She also ensured the horses some of the Sallys would become could live very nice lives.

Victoria and Amanda were also very concerned with planning out the farms. Ten million Sallys would be arriving soon and they all needed feeding.

Britney had maintained her composure under Shaun's massages but she could feel herself falling for him. She estimated that she had maybe 72 hours left before she was completely in awe of him and she wondered if she should request time to recharge by fighting in the guild but that wasn't why she was here. Shaun was a moral man doing very immoral things for the sake of achieving a greater good. He deserved the chance to relax and this was her sacrifice to make. She supposed that once her fight for agency had been completely rung out of her she could be given to the soldiers as a relaxation aid.

Christine was busy recruiting other lawyers to be Shaun's in house legal team to cover him and more importantly Raspberry and the Interference Agency should any of his operations become public.

Candi was getting accustomed to her new life as a human hamster and had taken to snatching crumbs of food from the table when Shaun sat down to eat and was contemplating getting one of those massive rotastak contruction homes to live in.
Of course Shaun was not actually forcing her to live as a hamster and would return her to normal size when she needed to go to the toilet, shower or eat. Indeed she supposed that if she actually asked to not be shrunk anymore that he would listen but she liked having a man look after her. Always had she supposed. Only now instead of a concerned father, jealous boyfriend or a corrupt corporate executive she had a benevolent pet owner who admired her beauty in the way she admired the beauty of a cat. There was nothing sexual or predatory about it, just a “You’re cute, I want to look after you” attitude.
Admittedly the function of this caring was administered though legally owning her, liking it when she wore bikinis and keeping her in his pocket but at least that was all Shaun wanted, especially now Britney was his go to plaything. There was no back seat guiding of her life, no patronizing unwillingness to trust her to make her own decisions and deal with them. When Shaun ate dinner with her there were no comments about what she ate or how she ate it. Shaun didn’t tell her how to live. There were rules and things that were encouraged but they were easily remembered and quantifiable with lots of freedom in between.
Not like the real world where men controlled her life down to the most minute details. Indeed it had been men who had advised she sell herself to Raspberry and women who had freed her, if only to be legally transferred to Shaun. She wondered if she could get flush-able toilets and a shower fitted in a hamster cage. A life as Shaun’s pet hamster was a life without media and micro management by men.

Cassie and Sammy had become house Sylphs, patrolling the house, checking on their people and gladly accepting the hugs and strokes they got.

Jo said. “Ooh this is interesting, I get to join the vampires.”

Shaun shook his head as he idly stroked Britney’s cheek. “If you pick the vampire path then you get a new perk tree that doesn’t stack with your other perks and items. Better to pick the Dawnguard route and get better crossbows and armor then continue leveling your other skills.”

Jo turned her head to stare at him. “You mean you chose Dawnguard?”

Shaun shrugged. “I only joined the Vampire Guild because Sammy recommended it and in fairness it has been very useful to the war effort. Hasn’t it, Britney?”

Britney stirred. “Oh, what?”

Shaun looked down at Britney as he repeated. “I said the Vampire Guild was very useful to the war effort. Don’t you agree?”

Britney realised what he was saying and laughed. “Yes, Sir, it has been very useful.”

Britney wrapped her arms around Shaun’s neck then leaned in to kiss him on the cheek then nuzzle him with hers.

Shaun hugged the woman.

He had decided that for clarity of station, and not being a complete prick, only the women he was actively playing with would be encouraged to wear bikinis and even then it was less Shaun being pervy and more an indication that his pets were actually pets since cats did not in general wear clothes.

Britney had asked whether she could take this logic to its natural conclusion and not wear any clothes at all. Shaun had deferred judgment until after Kirstin had made hers and Kirstin had decided that only when Shaun had tamed her so thoroughly that she lacked any agency would she allow this. The logic being that Britney would wear a bikini until she lost the last shreds of the independence that made her human. In practicality though Kirstin had made clear that Britney would remain clothed until Shaun stopped caring about her.

Shaun looked into Britney's eyes, felt the Farsh-nuke look into her soul and tell him what he already suspected. It would not be long until Britney could be as naked as the midday sun. Part of him started thinking practically, it was a coping mechanism that Shaun had developed after losing too many pets in childhood. The mind exists in three states at once, denial, mourning and practical acceptance.

The part of him that had already accepted Britney's loss of agency and independence started planning for what happened next: Hold a ceremony while she still has agency left, bequeath her to Esmerelda as a comfort Sylph for the new recruits to cuddle in hard times. Start playing with Amy, Callisto or Candi. Perhaps order another Britney from Diana? Except that felt hollow, a disservice to the Britney who would still live among his soldiers.

Jo heard the silence and turned to see a look she knew well. It was the look of a vampire hunter watching their friends get hunted down, knowing they couldn't do a thing about it. Except Jo could.

She spoke up. "You've realized it won't be long before Britney succumbs completely to your taming haven't you?"

Shaun nodded then realized Jo couldn't see and said. "Yes, yes I have and now I don't want her to. She's too bright and funny."

Jo barked a harsh laugh "The champion of the Sylphs realizing beautiful women are more than just trophies to be won. Britney may have started off as just a woman to be tamed to satisfy the Farsh-nuke's addiction but now she's become your friend and the flagrant objectification just isn't as fun."

Shaun was stunned. Hell, the Farsh-nuke was stunned.

Britney cried out "No! That's not true! I want this to happen! I want him to tame the agency out of me!"

Jo paused the game and turned to Britney. "Of course you do. With each moment that passes his hold over you grows stronger, pulling you ever faster towards the singularity of obedience. The problem is, Britney, that he cares too much about you now. He needs your mind as well as your body and I think we all know that he has that."

Britney looked up at Shaun. "I swore to give you every last ounce of strength I have."

Shaun squeezed Britney. “I know you did but Jo’s right. I don’t want your strength, I want your heart, soul and mind. You gave me those things gladly so I might take your strength and I thank you dearly but what I need now is for you to have the strength to continue as my loyal pet.”

Britney hugged Shaun. “Truly you are greater than the Farsh-nuke of legend. It was my honour to give myself to you and it is my honour now to do as you advise and regain my strength. Thank you.”

Jo said. “Now, Britney, when I was in the vampire game I remember hearing stories about you. Quite the hunter in your day.”

Britney sighed. “But I didn’t do those things, I’m a xerox photocopy from when she joined.”

Jo nodded. “Well this is Skyrim. it’s a computer game and I have just joined the Dawnguard, local vampire hunters, want to help?”

Britney leaned forward. “I’m interested”

The doorbell bonged “Shaun to the door, please!”

As Shaun left he whispered to Jo. “Look after her.”

*

Shaun answered the door and found Frank Dobbs waiting for him.

“Is there a problem?” asked Shaun.

Frank nodded. He was frowning. “Shaun, this is our first shipment. We think there may have been an issue with the 3d printer we used, would you like to come check?”

Shaun nodded and followed Frank towards where a large cardboard container sat on the quantum teleportation loading bay. Frank handed Shaun a box cutter knife.

Shaun cut along the sides of the box then he peeled back the lid and found Sally lying on a mattress, wearing a carefully tied red ribbon. She seemed to be sleeping.

Shaun reached out to stroke her face.

Sally reached out, grabbed his hand and rubbed her cheek against it. “It’s really me, Shaun.”

Shaun was staggered and Frank had to steady him.

“How?” asked Shaun

“Precedent.” said Frank. “This time we knew what to write, who to call and what to do plus Sally is really enthusiastic about this. She knows everything and can speak on the judge’s level outlining why this is important.”

“I meant how is she here? I thought you needed her to make movies?” said Shaun.

“Indeed we do.” said Frank. “But our cgi artists do most of the work. We did some motion capture as she read out the script and now you can have her back. Which reminds me, we have some paperwork to do before I deliver the actual stock. Sorry about the little joke, it was her idea.”

Sally called out. “And speaking of my idea, I believe you can shrink me, Shaun!? I don’t feel like walking!”

Shaun gave a boyish grin and shrunk Sally. He picked her up and played with her as he and Frank walked inside.

They walked to the kitchen parlor and Shaun rested Sally on a table as Frank pulled a thick wad of forms out of his pocket.

“These are the deeds of ownership.” said Frank. “They confirm that Sally is your legal property to do with as you wish but be aware that just because she signed her rights away legally does not mean Interference won’t be watching your conduct towards her. There are certain crimes that no amount of legally protection will cover.”

“Duly noted.” said Shaun as he started to untie the ribbon serving as Sally’s bikini.

“Right, now it’s time to start signing things.” said Frank as he handed him a pen.

Shaun started signing.

Sally was getting bored on the table so she crawled into Shaun’s pocket.

“Hey.” said Candi cheerfully. “You’re back.”

Sally nodded. “That I am. So tell me, what’s been happening since I’ve been gone?”

*

The signing of papers took a while but when it was both men sat back, proud.

Sally climbed back onto the table, followed by Candi.

“Congratulations, Shaun, you are the legal owner of Miss Sally White. Our ship will now displace all ten million units to a suitable area within your home, if it cannot find one, it will make one.” said Frank cheerfully.

Shaun squealed with delight. “Thank you, so much.”

“A pleasure. Sir” said Frank.

Sally cried. “Yay, Shaun!”

Shaun laughed and stroked Sally’s hair. “Thank you to you too. Shall we go and marshal the troops?”

Sally nodded. “Let’s get reacquainted first though?”

“Fair enough.” said Shaun with a grin. “I bid you goodbye, Frank.”

Frank nodded and left.

Shaun unwrapped Sally.

Sally grinned at him, naked in his hands.

Shaun stared at her for a long moment then pocketed her when he heard footsteps.

It was Michelle “I think I have it worked out. If I can just borrow your trousers for a minute?”

Shaun said “Or maybe we could go to the clothes cupboard and you could augment the new pair of trousers?”

“Good Idea.” said Michelle brightly

Michelle walked with Shaun to the clothes cupboard, a room larger than a department store.

Shaun managed to lose Michelle for a minute pulled Sally from his pocket, restored her to full size and hissed. “Find some clothes.”

Then Shaun returned to Michelle.

Once Shaun picked out some trousers he liked Michelle started to augment the pockets.

Michelle explained. “People are not meant to live in pockets. People need room to exercise, somewhere to defecate and wash themselves. I have designed pockets with an innovative door design leading into a pocket universe containing all the basic necessities that people need to be people. When you reach your hands into your pockets, brush your hand against the door and the people in your pockets will know to get out so you can play with them then when you are done deposit them in your pocket as normal, they will slide inside the door and do whatever they need to do.”

Sally laughed. “All this because the boy likes to play with shrunken women.”

Michelle and Shaun turned to see Sally was wearing tracksuit bottoms, trainers, a tanktop and a red leather jacket.

Michelle squeed and hugged Sally.

Sally hugged her back.

Michelle asked. “Is it official?”

Sally nodded and pulled back. “I am officially the legal property of one Shaun Emmanuel, AKA The Farsh-nuke.”

Michelle beamed. “I’m going to have horses and electricians, this is going to be so amazing. I must tell the others.”

Michelle left Sally and Shaun in the Clothes Cupboard.

Sally said. “So Candi told me something rather interesting?”

“Oh?” asked Shaun.

“She wants to be a human hamster. Wants you to get a rotastak set it up for her to live in.” said Sally.

“I’ll bare that in mind”. said Shaun.

Sally frowned. “You saw me naked. You saw me naked and now you’re about to ask if I will be your plaything.”

“I said no such thing.” said Shaun.

“But you’re thinking it.” said Sally. “And you’re also thinking if I didn’t want you to see me naked why did I dress in nothing but a present ribbon and you make a good point, a very good point, because I did want you to unwrap me, I did want you to see me naked. I think of you and I think of a sun giving such life to the universe but there’s a blackhole in its centre and I just feel like maybe if I feed myself to the black hole it will go away and the sun will keep shining.”

Shaun sighed. “Oh Sally-”

“I’m not finished.” said Sally defensively. “You like to think that your power to use other people comes from being a god, that you’re this twisted superhero doing the bad things because you’re been into the abyss and you won’t be corrupted but the truth is your power comes from the fact that you are a screwed up little boy with cthulu inside your head. We believe you when you tell us we should give ourselves to you because you don’t say it like a hero issuing an order, you say it like a dying loser begging us to listen to your last words.”

Shaun looked different now, he held himself taller, he pulled his muscles tight. His eyes were a vibrant emerald green.

The Farsh-nuke regarded Sally with a scowl. “You are right, young lady, right in more ways than you know but the truth does not help anybody. If Shaun listened to the truth he wouldn’t learn to be different, the insecurities are in the core of who he is, he would just die. That might sound manipulative, evil even but it is just the truth. Only I can stare into the abyss without being corrupted, Shaun would throw himself into it, try to go willingly so he could fight against it and he would lose. You can’t change who you are, only learn to accept it and manage it.”

Sally stared at the Farsh-nuke, she wondered when she’d truly meet him. “So what happens now?”

The Farsh-nuke explained casually “You will become his new pet. The units will be used to create the foundations of a great army and you will become the symbol of the war. The mascot of the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association. Candi will live out the rest of her days as a hamster. Britney will in time become his faithful dragon. Jo will return to the

vampire game as the leader of the guild once Diana is voted out and sent to war. Kirstin will become the head mistress of the Mages guild and her army of wizards will train a new contingent to fight on the front line. When the war is won Kirstin and Shaun will have a baby with Shaun becoming the Unleasher so she might deliver the baby. Raspberry will talk the Unleasher into becoming a movie star and print an almost infinite number of her to be sold as toys for the wealthy elite. Kirstin will realise this has happened and with peace restored force Raspberry to bring down the Logicios. Lucy Dance will then be president of the United Civilisations of the Multiverse and take the Pan Multiverse Good Time Association into their collective buying the legal rights to the Unleasher, Kirstin, Britney and you. With that much power at the centre there will be struggles but these will be met easily enough. Peace will reign in the multiverse."

Sally stared at him. "How do you know all this?"

The Farsh-nuke laughed "I don't. I'll be honest I haven't a clue how any of this ends. The curse of the multiverse being the living thing is is that we all have free will and you can't predict the consequences of an entire multiverse of individuals enacting their free will. Even if some of those individuals have been duplicated a few trillion times. What is certain however is that we now have a chance to make a difference in the war thanks to you."

Sally offered him her hand. "To the future then."

Shaun blinked as he regained control. "What were you saying?"

"I was saying that I love you and that I would like to have your babies some day. If you and Kirstin will let me." said Sally sweetly.

Shaun smiled as he accepted her hand. "Then lets go speak to Kirstin. Perhaps if we ask nicely and explain that the non-monogamy applies to her aswell she'll let us fuck Britney?"

"Isn't that the ultimate taboo in this society? For a Master to fuck their pet Sylph?" asked Sally curiously.

Shaun shrugged. "If it's evil to make love to a consenting adult who willingly submits then maybe I'm okay with being evil."

Sally gave Shaun a kiss on the lips.

"What was that for?" asked Shaun.

"For managing to surprise me once again." said Sally sweetly then she asked. "Do you think I could have a turn with Britney when you're done with her. She does seem such a cutie?"

Shaun laughed and walked off with her.

The End

Epilogue

Shaun opted to move on as part of the advance guard to the dimension Farsh-nukes would be sent to.

Eliza, Roberta and Michelle and a few of they best generals, plattoons, families and friends joined him to continue the fight in the other plane of reality.

Victoria and Amanda worked with Sallys and units donated by the Bam-Kursh to create a large farm capable of sustaining everyone who would be living on the estate, with room to grow the farm massively to feed those who would arrive the day the war ended.

Sammy, Cassie, Amy and Callisto had each been heavily tamed by Shaun, Kirstin and the others as the Great Septagonoid War reached its conclusion and all were in deep sexual relations with Shaun by the time the move to the high dimension happened and the idea of their not coming with him was impossible.

Britney however remained incredibly close to Shaun. Though raising children and the war kept them apart from time to time she was still thoroughly submissive to Shaun and both delighted in it. She and Sally always slept in bed with Shaun when they could and followed him to the new dimension without question.

Candi eventually recovered from her trauma after so many years living as a pet. She starred in films again and allowed herself to be duplicated in a limited run to comfort troops and promote her films. Shaun made sure her duplicafes went to good homes.

Diana Prime managed to survive the war and – knowing her beloved Lucy would go to the next realm regardless – she opted to move with Shaun and his convoy. Her Jo and Lucy coming with her along with some of her generals. Initially they started off in their own separate fortress but nostalgia drew her back to Shaun and they became friends and lovers.

Jo Prime remained in the Vampire Guild until she was taken out by the copy of Diana that had survived the war and had with her copies of Sally, Candi, Lisa and others. They used the backups from the game to get Britney, Amy and Callisto back then joined the Freedom Collective.

Kirstin and her mages were not told about the move to the higher plane as Shaun did not want his wife to trap herself and knew that she had the agency to go on without him. For her part Kirstin did let Shaun move on without him but only so she could see that the Logicios were defeated and that the multiverse was safely in the hands of the Freedom Collective. She and her mages moved on to Shaun's dimension with a lot of much needed supplies and technological infrastructure as well as a lot of willing volunteers to live in and help run civilisation on this new plain of existence. There were however a few other gifts.

*

Shaun stared at the sight of two gorgeous blondes in bikinis, a beautiful Latina woman in flowery wrap dress and a tall pale woman with flame red hair in a three piece suit. All slept soundly inside special plastic fronted crates.

"The ginger woman is called Amy Hurst and the women beside her belong to her. Actually they aren't the only ones. She was quite the busy girl." explained Kirstin happily. "The point however is that I found her and her property when I was investigating the Freedom Collective. It seems I – or rather Viorum Kaztif-Tan – own her. She's supposed to be a gift for the new deity to fill the Farsh-nuke's place in the pantheon but I explained my intention to return to you and I was allowed copies.

I actually have copies of a few prominent members of the new muultiverse and I gift them all to you. An apology for taking so long to get here."

"You're here and you're safe. That's what matters." said Shaun as he hugged her.